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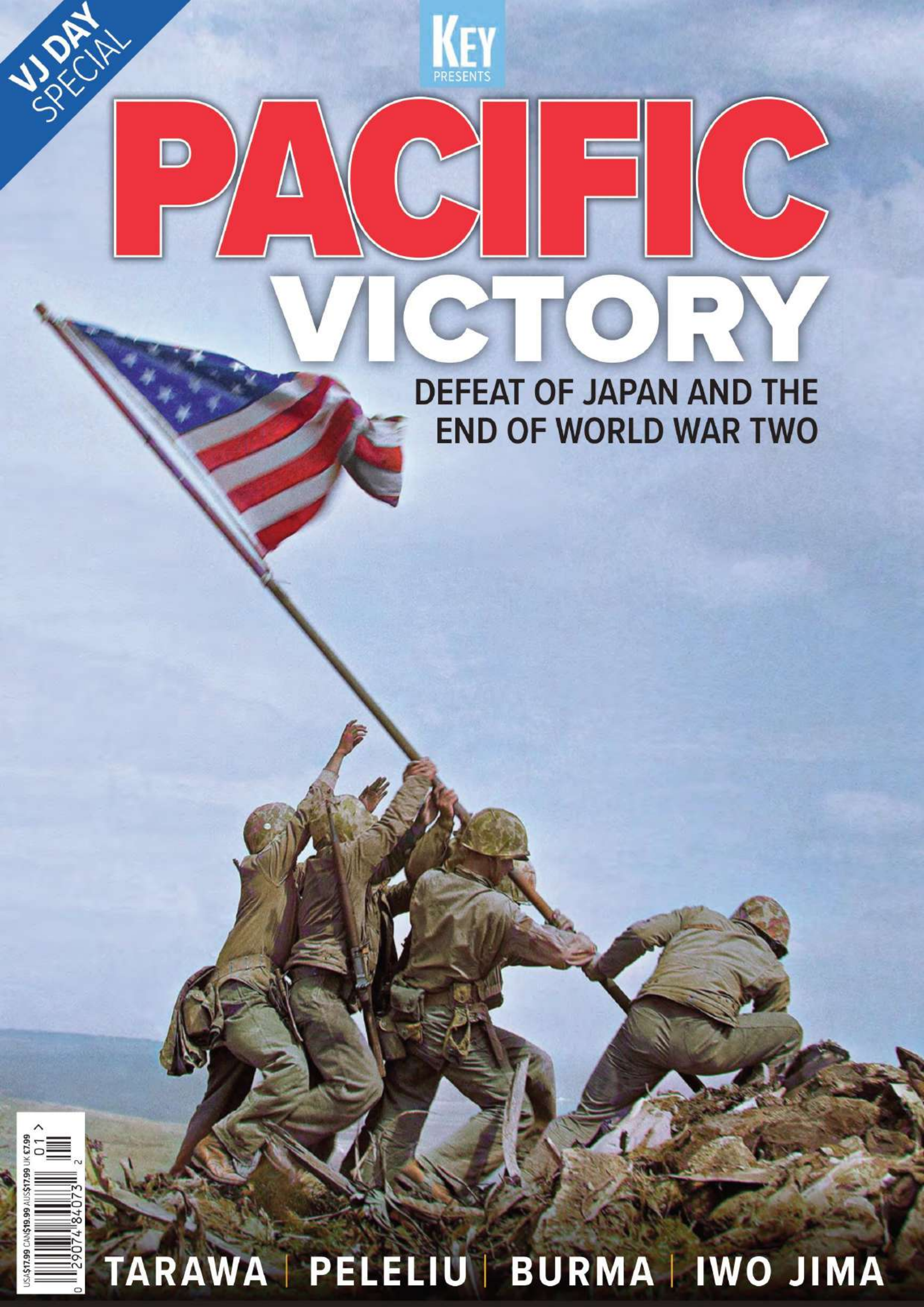
KEY PRESENTS

PACIFIC VICTORY

DEFEAT OF JAPAN AND THE END OF WORLD WAR TWO



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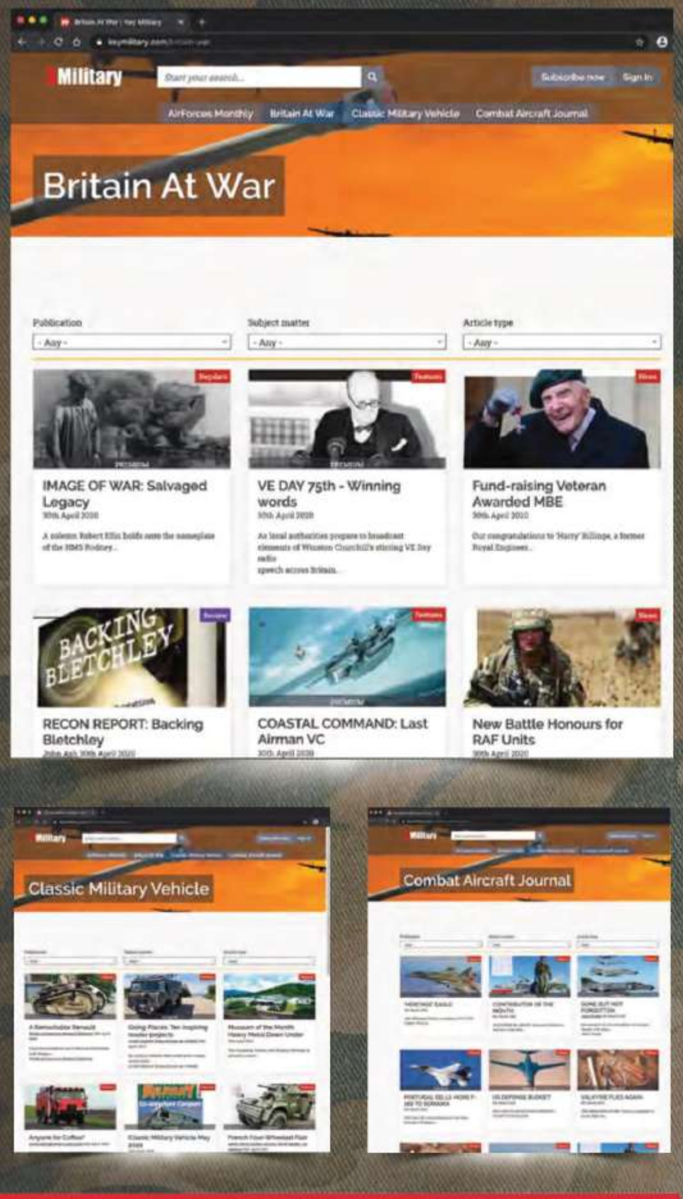
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30th April 2020
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PACIFIC VICTORY

The End of The Second World War

The war in the Far East began and ended with two of the most cataclysmic events of the Second World War – Pearl Harbor and the releasing of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In between these epoch-changing actions a savage war was fought across vast swathes of the Pacific and Southeast Asia, which saw the forces of Imperial Japan overrunning the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, the Solomon Islands, Singapore and many other territories in or bordering the Pacific.

The British and Americans suffered heavy defeats, but were gradually able to fight back, defeating the Japanese at the momentous battles of Guadalcanal, Midway and Coral Sea. These three engagements turned the tide of the war in the Pacific. But to completely defeat the Japanese, the Allied leaders knew they had to strike at the very heart of Japan. One by one, the enemy-held islands were seized by the Allies, invariably at a huge cost, as they crept to within striking distance of Tokyo.

In 1945, amphibious operations were mounted to take the southern Japanese islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, the defenders fighting to the bitter end in an attempt to hold their territory. So determined was their stand, that it became clear that any attempt at taking the main Japanese islands would result in casualties on a scale that the peoples of the Western countries would never accept.

The British and Americans had, however, been working on a new type of weapon, the destructive power of which would render all other weapons and every defensive measure redundant – the atomic bomb. On August 6, 1945, the first of these weapons was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, followed three days later by a second on Nagasaki. On August 15, 1945, Emperor Hirohito announced to the world that the armed forces of Imperial Japan had surrendered. This was formally signed aboard USS *Missouri* in Toyko Bay on September 2 – an act which finally brought the Second World War to an end.

Packed with an unrivalled collection of photographs, this is the story of how the Allied victory in the Pacific was achieved.

John Grehan

John Grehan
Editor

ACKNOWLEDGMENT: The editorial team would like to thank Robert Mitchell for his assistance with the images in this publication, as well as James Luto for permitting access to his collection and archive.

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Distribution: Seymour Distribution Ltd. Tel: 020 7429400

Printed by Precision Colour Printing Ltd, Haldane, Halesfield 1, Telford, Shropshire. TF7 4QQ

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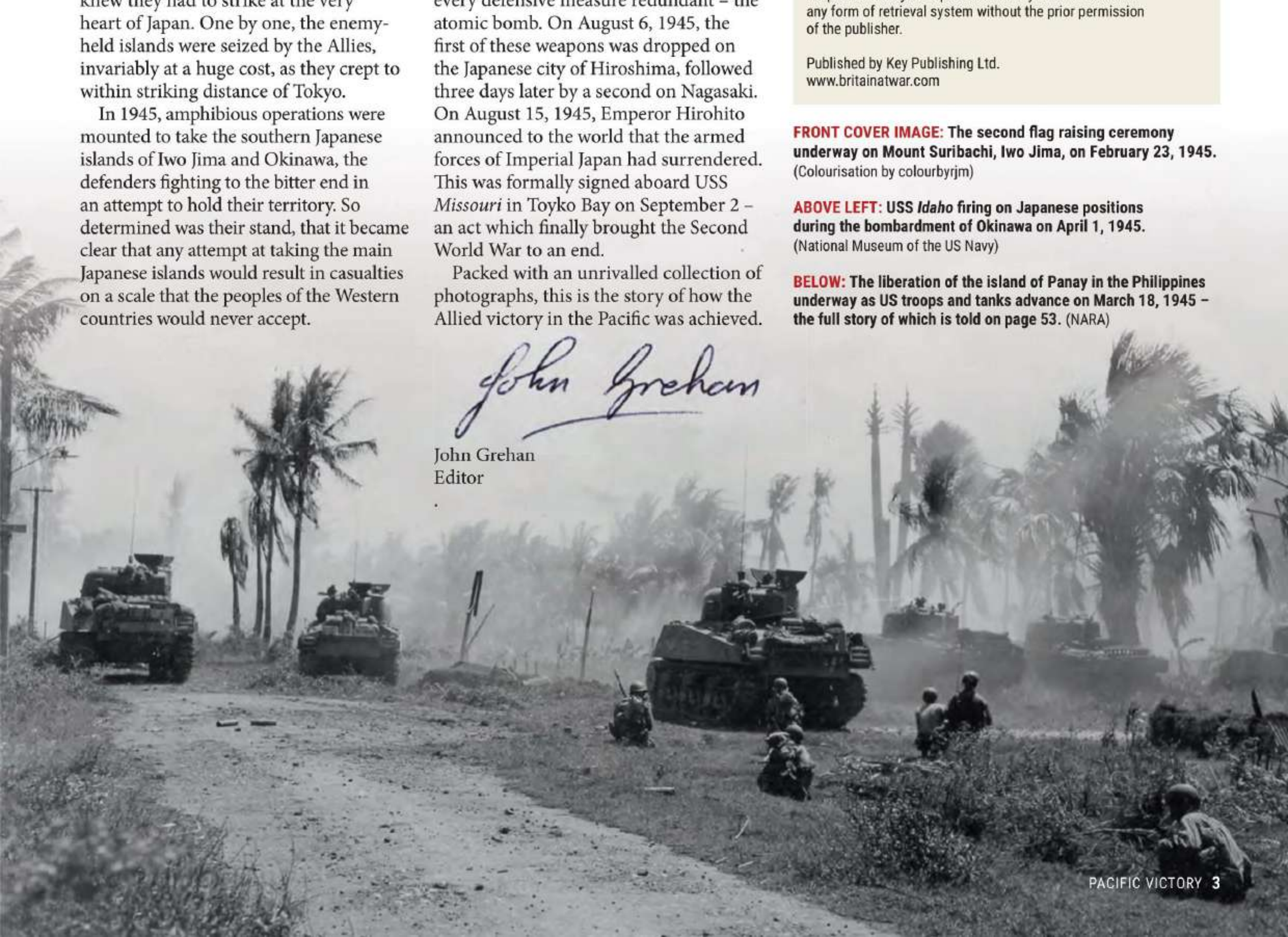
FRONT COVER IMAGE: The second flag raising ceremony underway on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, on February 23, 1945. (Colourisation by colourbyrjm)

ABOVE LEFT: USS *Idaho* firing on Japanese positions during the bombardment of Okinawa on April 1, 1945. (National Museum of the US Navy)

BELOW: The liberation of the island of Panay in the Philippines underway as US troops and tanks advance on March 18, 1945 – the full story of which is told on page 53. (NARA)



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The US Navy's LST-829 pictured underway during the Okinawa landings in April 1945. (USNHHC)

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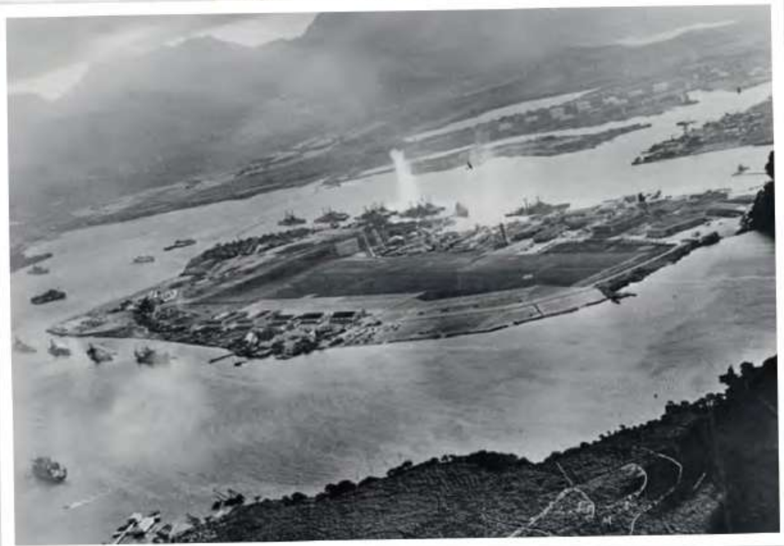
TURNING THE TIDE IN THE PACIFIC

It had been a long and costly journey since Pearl Harbor in 1941, but for the Allies the path to victory in the Pacific was becoming increasingly apparent.



RIGHT: **The strike on Pearl Harbor underway, as seen from a Japanese plane during the torpedo attack on ships moored on both sides of Ford Island.** (USNHHC)

BELOW: **A Japanese Navy Mitsubishi A6M Zero, tail code A1-108, takes off from the aircraft carrier *Akagi* on its way to attack Pearl Harbor during the morning of December 7, 1941.** (National Museum of the US Navy)

Just before 08.00 hours on the morning of Sunday, December 7, 1941, Japanese forces launched a surprise, pre-emptive military strike against the US Navy's base at Pearl Harbor. In one fateful move, the Empire of Japan had brought war to the Pacific.

The attack by Japanese carrier-borne aircraft stunned the world. All eight American battleships that formed the backbone of the US Navy's Pacific Fleet were either damaged or destroyed, along with eleven other vessels and more that 300 aircraft. However, this was only the first stage in Emperor Hirohito's plan to seize territories across the Pacific which would enable Japan to acquire the raw materials it needed to maintain the war and dominate East Asia.

Less than four hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Guam was subjected to a two-day aerial bombardment from Japanese aircraft based at nearby Saipan before, on December 9 and 10, Rear Admiral Gotō, flying his flag on the heavy cruiser *Aoba*, landed 5,000 men including one troop of mounted cavalry. All that stood in their way were around 300 marines and a similar number of local militia. The fighting lasted for just twenty-five minutes before the island's governor, Captain George J McMillin, ordered the Stars and Stripes to be hauled down.

The months that followed saw the Japanese enjoy a series of astonishing victories which carried them halfway across the Pacific. Wake Island, the Gilberts and the British colony of Hong Kong all fell before the end of 1941. In the early months of the following year, they were followed by the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), Malaya, Singapore, and Burma, among others. With each victory, the Japanese had even managed to bring the war literally to the shores of Australia itself.

ABOVE: The battleship USS *Missouri*, on which the war in the Pacific officially ended in 1945, steams into Naval Station Pearl Harbor in December 1991. In the background is the USS Arizona Memorial, commemorating one of the US warships linked to the very start of the conflict in that theatre. (NARA)

Over many lands within or bordering the Pacific Ocean, the flag of the Empire of the Sun fluttered peacefully above the nations of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. It had been hoped in Tokyo that the war in the East would have been won in 1942. But rather than seek to negotiate with the Emperor, the Allies now sought only to defeat Japan, with every degree of ruthless determination as the Japanese had shown. Both the Allies and the Japanese had lost heavily in men and materiel in the battles of the first year of the war in the Pacific, but the land of the free and the home of the brave could sustain those losses far easier than that of the Rising Sun. And another empire, that upon which the sun would never set, was determined to regain its poise and restore its pride.

LEFT: Taken from a wartime Japanese news reel, this image shows Japanese soldiers landing on a beach during the invasion of Malaya, December 8-9, 1941. Note the ships of the invasion force in the background. (Critical Past)

After heavy, and embarrassing defeats, which included the loss of the pride of the Royal Navy, HMS *Prince of Wales*, and the surrender of 80,000 British and Commonwealth troops in Singapore, as well as the disastrous Battle of the Java Sea in which five Allied cruisers were sunk and a similar result at the Battle of Savo Island which still stands as the US Navy's worst defeat, the Allied fightback began. The Japanese advance across the Pacific was halted at the Battle of the Coral Sea, and at Midway Island, the Japanese aircraft carrier force which had attacked Pearl Harbor was destroyed. The Japanese were driven out of Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands, and the British Army started offensive operations in Burma. Slowly, the tide was beginning to turn. At the Battle of the Bismarck Sea in March 1943 most of the Japanese naval task force was destroyed along with hundreds of aircraft and aircrew.

During the fourteen months since Pearl Harbor, the Allies had laid a solid foundation for the recovery of their lost territories. Across the Pacific from the American continent to Australia and New Zealand a long chain of island bases had been established to guard the communications, permit the servicing of ships and aircraft, and facilitate the great bodies of men and the vast quantities of equipment and stores needed for the long and difficult operations to come.

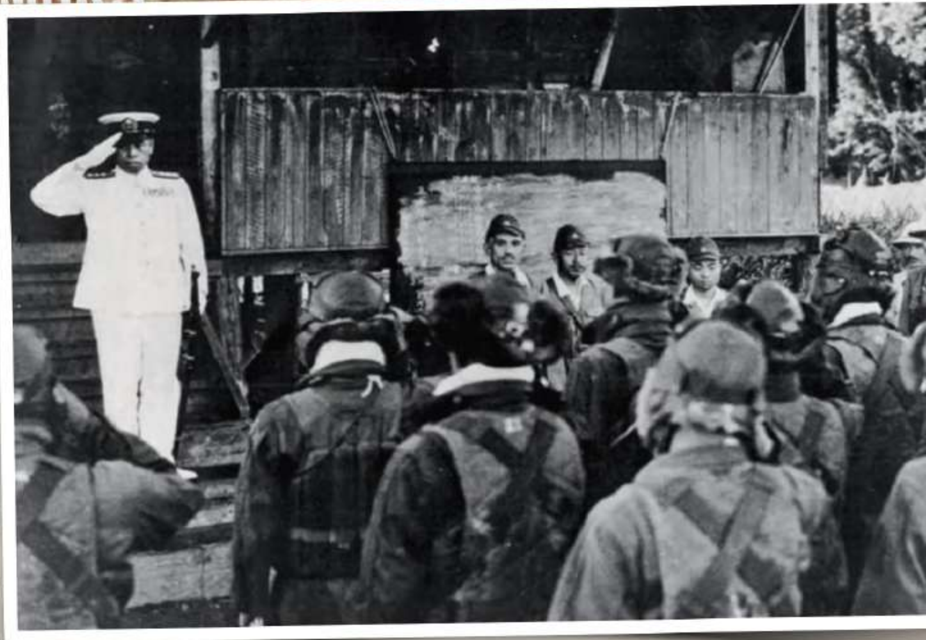
Considerable progress had also been made in the Allies' factories, docks and shipyards. In the autumn of 1942, there had been only three US aircraft carriers left afloat in the Pacific. By the end of 1943, there were fifty carriers of all kinds in the United States' fleet which had enabled the Americans to start the offensive which would continue until Japan had been brought to its knees.

Though the war in the Pacific would grind remorselessly on for another two terrible years, it was becoming increasingly clear that there could only be one outcome – the utter defeat of Imperial Japan.

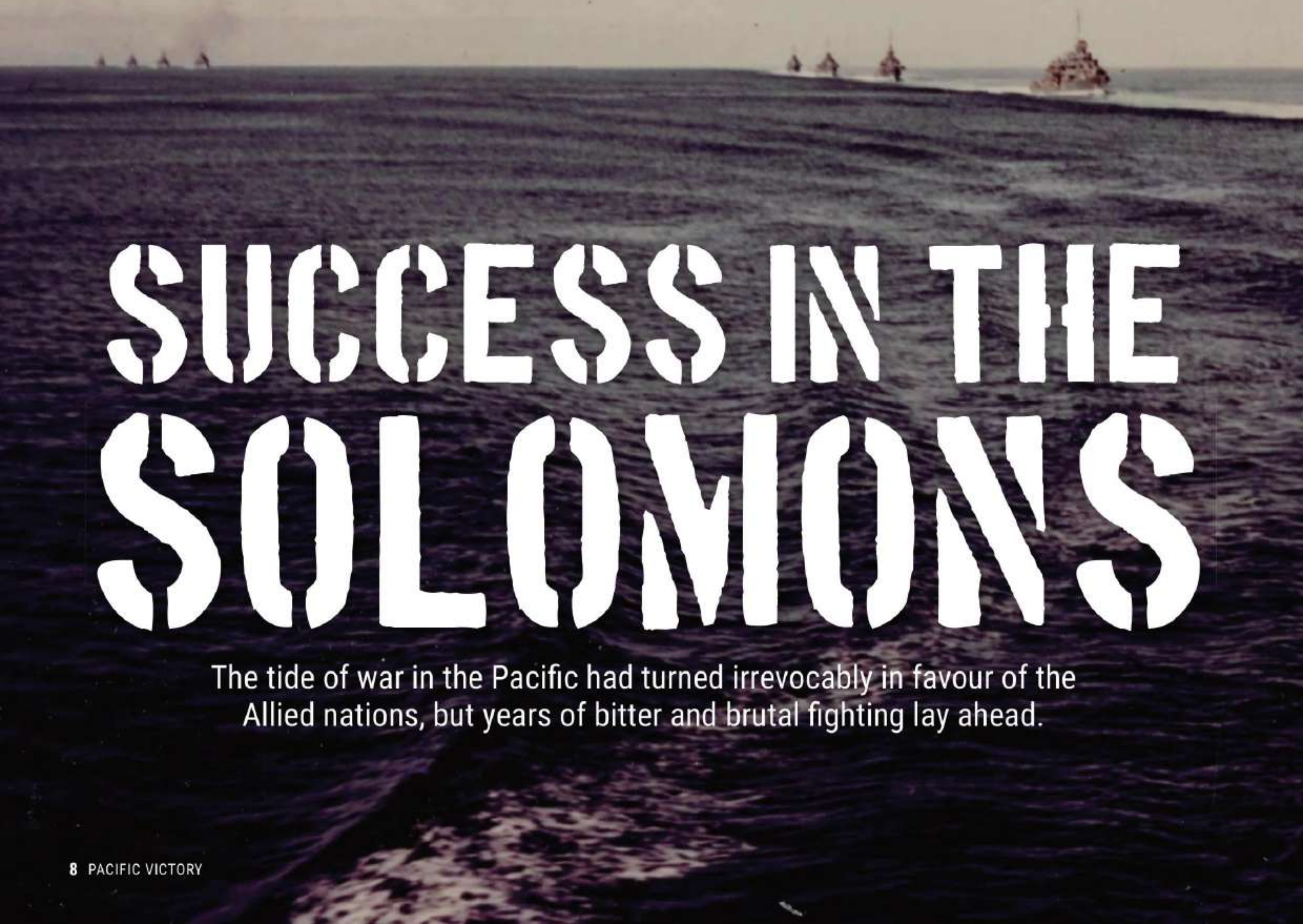
LEFT: Lieutenant General Arthur Percival and his party carry the Union Flag on their way to surrender Singapore to the Japanese, February 15, 1942. This was the heaviest defeat ever suffered by the British Army. (Historic Military Press)

SUCCESS IN THE SOLOMONS

The tide of war in the Pacific had turned irrevocably in favour of the Allied nations, but years of bitter and brutal fighting lay ahead.



RIGHT: The last picture of Admiral *Isoroku* Yamamoto alive. Showing him saluting Japanese naval pilots, it was taken shortly before his departure from Rabaul on April 18, 1943. Within hours he would be lying dead in the dense jungle of Bougainville. (via Historic Military Press)



MAIN PICTURE: The Allied offensive in the Pacific underway in 1943. These US warships of Task Force 18 are pictured during operations against enemy positions on Kolombangara and New Georgia, May 13. One of the targets shelled during the night bombardment which these *warships* carried out was the Japanese airfield at Vila on Kolombangara. (USNHHC)

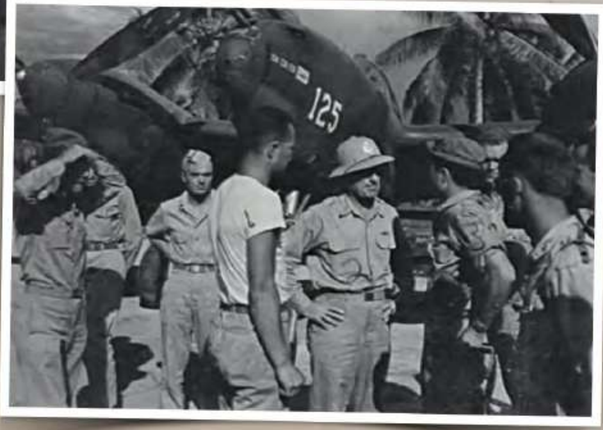
With their focus firmly turned towards victory, the aim of the Allied offensive in the Far East was to advance on Japan itself from the east and the south, whilst, of course, forcing the enemy from Burma and Malaysia. In the Pacific, a combined Allied army-navy force under General MacArthur was to fight its way north, from its Australian and New Caledonian bases, along the north coast of New Guinea towards the Philippines. At the same time, Admiral Nimitz would move westwards from Hawaii with an army-navy-marine force behind a screen of aircraft carriers, cutting right through the Japanese supply routes.

The Allies would accomplish the drive on Japan by seizing only those places or islands essential as bases or to ensure the security of their lines of communication, while 'leap-frogging' those that were less important. The Japanese garrisons left behind would be isolated and allowed to surrender or starve. This was a policy that could only be accomplished if the Allies had complete control of the sea and the air. The first part of their plan, therefore, was the neutralising of the enemy bases in the Solomon Islands and New Georgia.

Although the Japanese had been driven from Guadalcanal, they had no intention of abandoning the Solomons, which, today, is a sovereign state consisting of six major islands and over 900 smaller islands lying to the east of Papua New Guinea in Oceania. In fact, in February 1943 they were spotted building new airfields on the archipelago. But such was the already overwhelming strength of the American forces in the Pacific, as soon as the construction of the airfields became known, US aircraft from Guadalcanal and warships of the South Pacific Fleet bombed and shelled the enemy positions, albeit with little lasting effect.

With their fleet having been severely reduced in the Battle of Midway and subsequent actions, the only way the Japanese could interfere with Allied

operations was in the air. Indeed, so weakened was the Japanese Imperial Navy that it began to use carrier aircraft from ground bases. The first time that the Japanese operated carrier aircraft in this manner was on April 7, 1943, when a force of 216 shore-based carrier aircraft attacked Allied shipping at Guadalcanal, Port Moresby and other locations in the region. The Americans were ready and waiting when a repeat of the raid was attempted on April 16, with the result that the Japanese lost 106 of their aircraft.



BELOW LEFT: **Wearing a T-shirt, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Vicellio, Commanding Officer of the 347th Fighter Group, is pictured at Guadalcanal following his return from Operation *Vengeance*. He is seen here debriefing with Major General Nathan F Twining (in the pith helmet) and Major John W Mitchell (facing Twining).** (NARA)

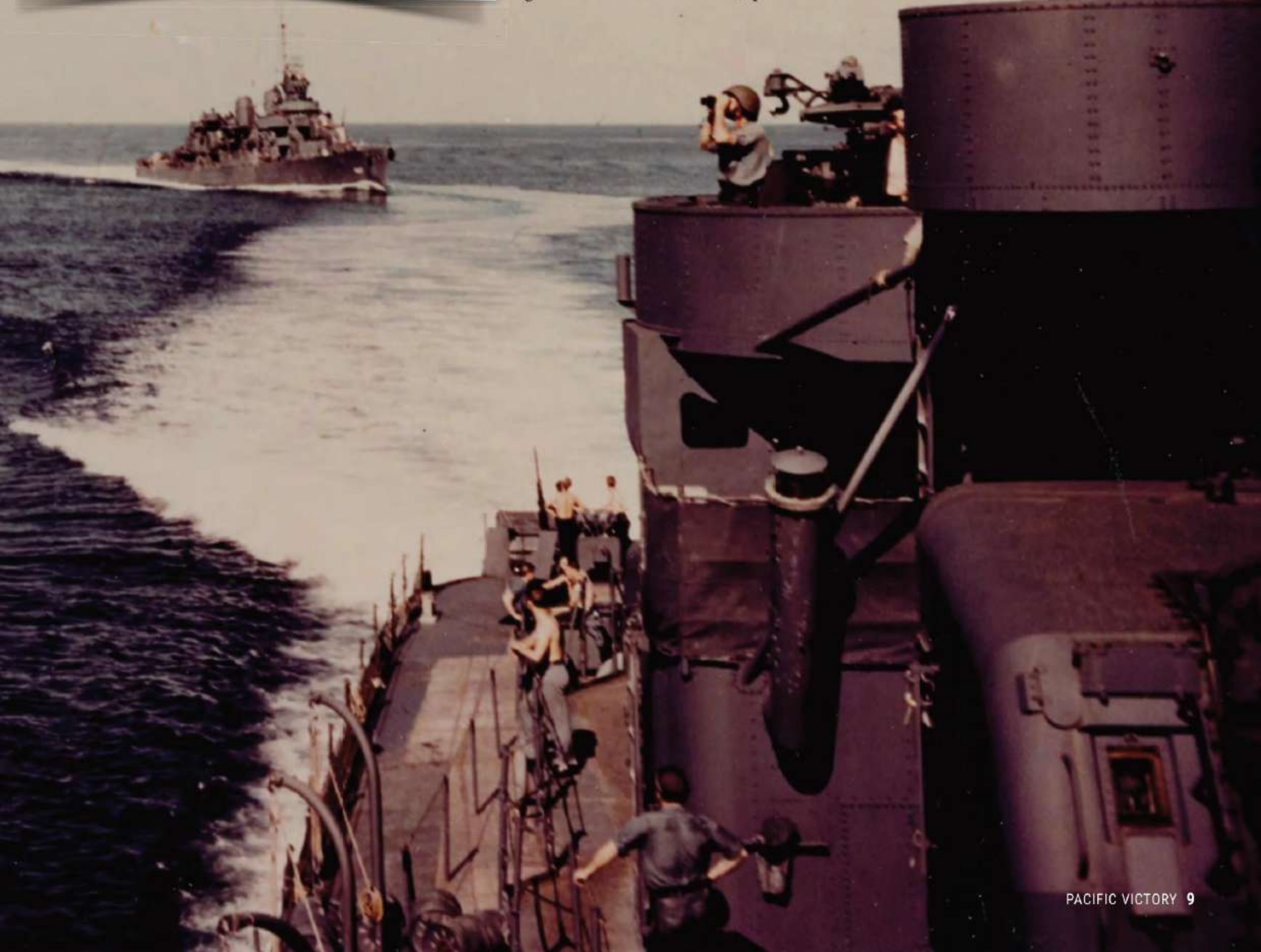
"GET YAMAMOTO"

Two days after this battle, the Japanese suffered another major loss. Admiral *Isoroku* Yamamoto, the man who had masterminded the spectacular attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, and the commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy, was known to be touring Japanese bases in the Solomon Islands. US codebreakers had intercepted messages detailing his itinerary, as well as the number and types of aircraft that would transport and accompany him on his journey. They discovered, for example, that Yamamoto would be leaving Rabaul on April 18, 1943, and that he planned to fly to Balalae Airfield, which was located on an island near Bougainville in the Solomon Islands.

The cryptologists had established that the Admiral and his staff would be flying in two Mitsubishi G4M bombers, which, in turn, would be escorted by six Zero fighters. The codebreakers even knew his exact time of departure – 06.00 hours. Presented with such an unexpected opportunity, it is said, though never officially confirmed, that President Roosevelt issued the order "Get Yamamoto". It is said that the decision to effectively assassinate Yamamoto serves as the first example of a targeted killing by the US military.[1] The operation was codenamed *Vengeance*.

While Yamamoto's position and prestige certainly merited an attempt to eliminate him, there were fears that the Japanese would quickly realise that such a specific operation could only have been accomplished if the Americans had intercepted, and read, their secret signals. This was far too valuable a resource to jeopardise. Nevertheless, it was believed that a credible cover story could be announced afterwards that the aircraft had been spotted by Australians near Rabaul.

For the mission, eighteen of the best fighter pilots were selected from two squadrons of the 347th Fighter Group, the 12th and 339th. Equipped with drop tanks, their Lockheed P-38G Lightnings had the range to intercept and engage the Japanese aircraft. »



ABOVE: Pictured a month after Operation *Vengeance*, having force-landed, this P-38G of the 339th Fighter Squadron, #43-2264, was the aircraft flown by Lieutenant Rex T. Barber during the attack on Yamamoto's formation. Nicknamed *Miss Virginia*, it was the regular mount of Captain Robert L Petit. Having returned from the operation on April 18, 1943, groundcrew counted over 100 holes in the airframe, all the result of return Japanese fire. (NARA)

TOP RIGHT: The Quebec Conference underway in August 1943. Pictured seated on the terrace of the Citadel in Quebec, surrounded by senior Allied commanders, are, left to right, Mackenzie King, Franklin D Roosevelt and Winston Churchill. (USNHHC)

ABOVE: A close-up of the heavy cruiser *Haguro* in Simpson Harbour taken during the USAAF attack on November 2. She had been damaged the night before during the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay. (USNHHC)

Such was the accuracy of the planning, the P-38s arrived at the anticipated interception point at 09.34 hours, just one minute early. The engagement that followed was brutally quick, lasting less than two minutes. Just four of the US pilots had been designated as the 'killer flight', and instructed to target Yamamoto's bomber, leaving the other fighters to deal with the escorting Zeros.

However, two of the four of the 'killer flight' were forced to drop out, leaving Captain Thomas G. Lanphier Jr. and Lieutenant Rex T. Barber to complete the mission. In the combat, both men fired at Yamamoto's plane when it was spotted near Kahili, Bougainville. Because of the pre-emptive raid on Pearl Harbor, Americans saw Yamamoto as the epitome of evil and when Lanphier climbed from his aircraft back at base, he smiled as he told one of the crew chiefs: "I got him, I got that son-of-a-bitch, I got Yamamoto!"[2]

Japanese morale had been struck a severe blow and that of the US forces raised in an equal measure, fully justifying the decision to target Yamamoto. What the mission also demonstrated was just how far the enemy had fallen since those early days of the war in the Pacific when the Japanese, led in great part by Yamamoto, were riding a seemingly unstoppable wave of success. The war had now turned against them – and both sides knew it.

RIGHT: Two officers of the Special Devices Division, part of the Bureau of Aeronautics in Washington DC, construct a relief map of Rabaul's Simpson Harbour for the familiarisation of aircrew, circa 1943. (USNHHC)

THE QUEBEC CONFERENCE

The Japanese had already lost heavily in early March when around twenty ships were sunk in the Battle of the Bismarck Sea. This paved the way for US forces, under the command of Admiral 'Bull' Halsey, to land on New Georgia during the night of June 29-30, while MacArthur struck at Nassau Bay. The following day two US Army regiments, the 112th Cavalry and the 158th Infantry, made unopposed landings at Woodlark and Kiriwina respectively. These were the first of no less than ten operations which, under the umbrella name of Operation *Cartwheel*, were intended to finally eliminate the Japanese threat in New Guinea.

The main enemy base in New Guinea was at Rabaul on New Britain, the largest island in the Bismarck Archipelago. Rabaul was the major Japanese forward base in the South Pacific, and, as such, was not one of the places that could simply be leap-frogged. It had to be taken before the forces under General MacArthur could advance towards the Philippines.

New Guinea is the second largest island in the world. Large parts of it suffer torrential rain, and disease, particularly malaria, dengue fever and scrub typhus, is ever present. There were no roads or railways, and supply lines were often little more than native tracks. It was appalling terrain to move through, let alone fight a resolute enemy in, and as a result little progress was made for weeks on end.

Both sides tried to reinforce their troops in New Guinea and in the first week of July 1943, a US Task Force of three light cruisers and four destroyers was sent to intercept the Japanese supply convoy, known as the 'Tokyo Express'. This resulted in the sinking of two Japanese destroyers, though one US destroyer was also sunk. A second attack upon the Tokyo Express took place on the night of July 13/14. On this occasion, a Japanese cruiser was sunk, as well as another US Navy destroyer. In both engagements the Japanese had numerous ships badly damaged, and supplies and reinforcements to their bases on the northern coast of New Guinea were severely reduced.

However, Allied progress was slow – described by Admiral King as "inch-by-inch" – and costly. Then, as *Cartwheel* raged on, in August 1943 President Roosevelt, Winston Churchill and the Canadian Prime Minister, William Mackenzie King, met in Quebec at the 'Quadrant' Conference. Though the main topic under discussion was the D-Day invasion of Normandy scheduled for the summer of 1944, strategy in the Pacific was also on the agenda. Operation *Cartwheel* was not progressing as quickly as had been hoped and the Combined Chiefs of Staff, also at the conference, proposed that rather than capturing Rabaul, the same effect could be achieved by destroying it from the air.

THE REDUCTION OF RABAUL

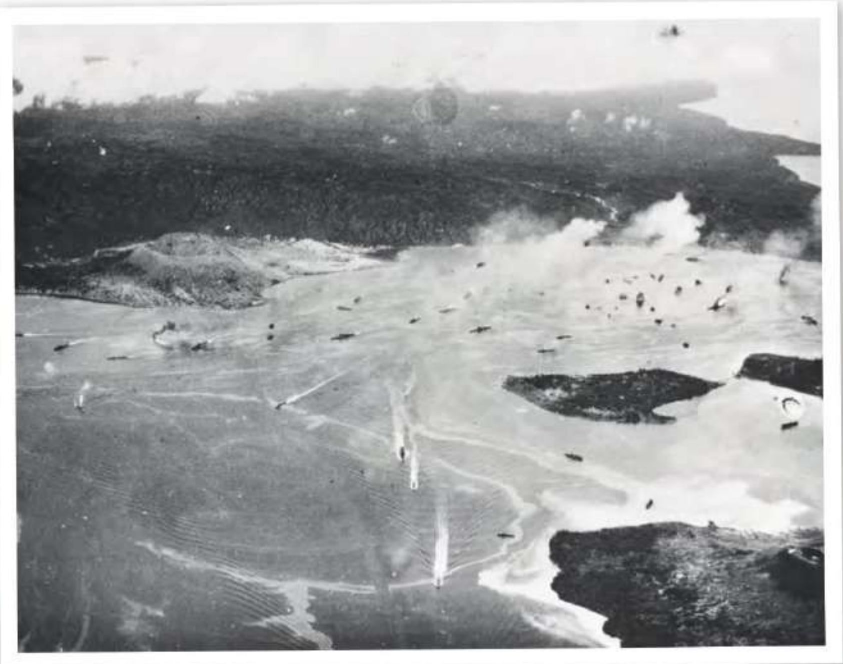
The task of bombing Rabaul was handed to the US Fifth Air Force, along with elements of the Royal Australian Air Force and the Royal New Zealand Air Force. Rabaul was ripe for an air attack, with enemy transports, cargo ships, and smaller craft, together with some warships, crowded into Simpson Harbour.

The first big attack took place on October 12. A force of 349 aircraft was despatched, consisting of 87 heavy bombers, 114 B-25 medium bombers, 12 Beaufighters, and 125 P-38s, plus some weather and photographic reconnaissance planes – or as the commander of the Allied air forces, Lieutenant General George Kenney, put it: "Everything that I owned that was in commission, and could fly that far."

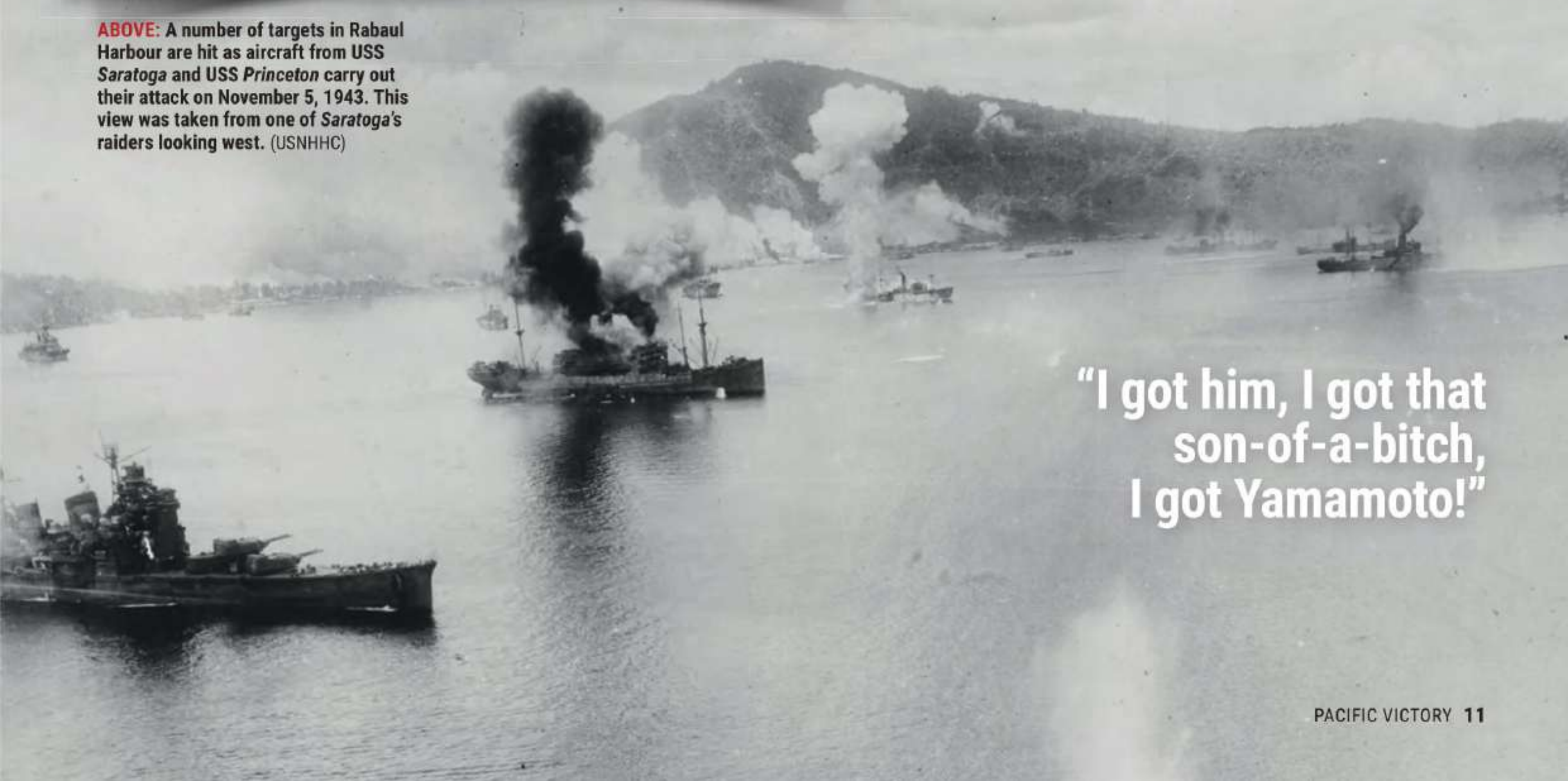
The Japanese were taken by surprise and only four Allied aircraft were lost. Kenney continued his attacks during breaks in the weather. Each raid went well, until, that is, the attack of November 2. On that occasion, reinforcements, in the form of a large number of carrier fighters which had been flown down from their base at Truk, meant that the Japanese were able to put up a stronger defence than had previously been the case.

To bolster the Allied offensive, airfields closer to Rabaul were needed and to this end 'Bull' Halsey undertook the »

ABOVE: Dawn breaks over the flight deck of USS *Saratoga* as preparations for the attack on Rabaul begin on November 5, 1943. (USNHHC)

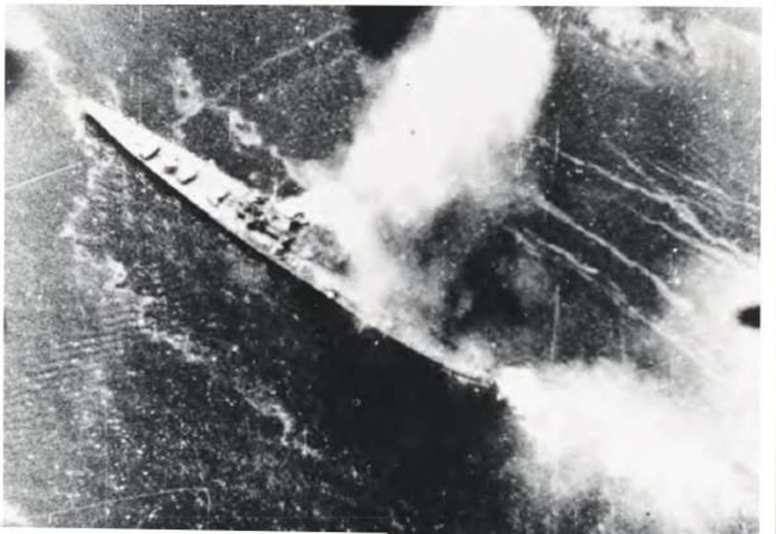


ABOVE: A number of targets in Rabaul Harbour are hit as aircraft from USS *Saratoga* and USS *Princeton* carry out their attack on November 5, 1943. This view was taken from one of *Saratoga's* raiders looking west. (USNHHC)



BELOW: Japanese ships under attack in Simpson Harbour, by aircraft of the USAAF 3rd Bomb Group, on November 2, 1943. The heavy cruiser *Haguro* is partially visible at left, with what appears to be the submarine tender *Chogei* or *Jingei* beyond. A transport is on fire in the centre. (USNHHC)

"I got him, I got that son-of-a-bitch, I got Yamamoto!"



RIGHT: The Japanese heavy cruiser *Chikuma* photographed from a USS *Saratoga* SBD scout bomber's gun camera during the raid on Rabaul, November 5, 1943. (USNHHC)

MIDDLE LEFT: Medical corpsmen and aircraft handlers remove a casualty from a Grumman TBF Avenger just after it landed on USS *Saratoga* after being shot up over Rabaul, November 5, 1943. This is the rear gunner, Aviation Ordnance Man Kenneth Bratton, who was badly wounded. Photographer's Mate First Class Paul Barnett was killed while photographing a Japanese Zero fighter making a head-on attack on the TBF. Commander Henry H Caldwell, the pilot, survived, having made a one-wheel landing with no flaps, ailerons or radio. (National Museum of the United States Navy)

MIDDLE RIGHT: Commander Joseph C Clifton hands out cigars to fellow aircrew on USS *Saratoga* following the raid on Rabaul on November 5, 1943. (USNHHC)

invasion of Bougainville at the beginning of November. It was estimated that the Japanese garrison on Bougainville might number as many as 65,000 men and so Halsey agreed that only enough would be seized to allow the establishment of an airfield would be seized.

Because the Japanese aircraft at Rabaul were on the defensive due to Kenney's attacks, they were not able to interfere with the US landings on Bougainville. However, while their air forces might be fully engaged, the Japanese were not powerless, and a large surface fleet, which included no less than ten cruisers, was despatched from Truk to stop the invasion of Bougainville. Halsey had nothing more than destroyers, but he did have his aircraft carriers.

When the Japanese fleet stopped to refuel at Rabaul, Halsey seized the moment. His Task Force 38, which included a pair of aircraft carriers, reached its launching point in the Solomon Sea, 230 miles southeast of Rabaul, at 09.00 hours on November 5. The weather was fine for carrier operations; a steady breeze was blowing, and there were frequent rain squalls in which the warships could hide in case of air attack.

The two carriers sent out a total of ninety-seven aircraft – a force which comprised twenty-three torpedo bombers and twenty-two dive bombers protected by fifty-two fighters. They arrived over Rabaul and dived through a hole in the clouds to take the Japanese by surprise. Though faced by intense anti-aircraft fire, they damaged three heavy cruisers, two light cruisers, and two destroyers so severely that months passed before any of them were fit to fight again.

One of the US pilots who participated in the attack that day was Robert Lee Cropper, who flew a Grumman TBM Avenger off the USS Saratoga: "We launched [all our planes], and it was the longest launching way from the target the Navy had ever done at the time … I came around and my wing tip was almost lying on a volcanic mountain at the entrance to the Harbor. The [Japanese] fleet was steaming out, trying to get to sea so that they could maneuver [*sic*].

"When I hit [the cruiser] and came over him, I passed over the bow of this cruiser after dropping my torpedo. Now this [Japanese] cruiser had four mounts of eight-inch cannons going off, but I was right at bridge level off my wing tip. I could see the officers on the bridge as I passed over."[3] The warship that Cropper attacked was the battle-worn Tone-class heavy cruiser *Chikuma*.

Two days later, more carriers joined Halsey's force and further raids were undertaken against Rabaul. In combination with attacks delivered from Bougainville, the carriers recommenced the 'pacification' of Rabaul on December 17. Operations continued throughout the month and into the New Year, with hundreds of Japanese aircraft being destroyed. Most significant of all was the enemy's loss of large numbers of carrier aircraft and experienced maintenance crews, the consequences of which shall be seen in due course. Faced with such a relentless Allied onslaught, in February 1944 the Japanese command decided to withdraw all of its remaining pilots and aircrews from Rabaul.

The once formidable base was no longer a threat to Allied operations and its remaining garrison was left isolated and ineffectual. It was also subjected to continued air attacks, the Allied forces using Rabaul as a live-fire exercise to give aircrew some taste of combat before committing them to more active theatres.

NOTES:

1. Adonis C. Arvanitakis, *Killing a Peacock: A Case Study of the Targeted Killing of Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto* (Army Command and General Staff College Fort Leavenworth, 2015), p.8.
2. Donald A. Davis, *Lightning Strike: The Secret Mission to Kill Admiral Yamamoto and Avenge Pearl Harbor* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 2005), p.274.
3. The full account can be seen at: www.opvets.org/robert-lee-cropper.

BELOW: A Japanese bomber explodes on the water just astern of USS *Essex* after being shot down by anti-aircraft fire during a carrier strike against Rabaul on November 11, 1943. Just visible in the background on the right is the carrier USS *Independence*. (USNHHC)

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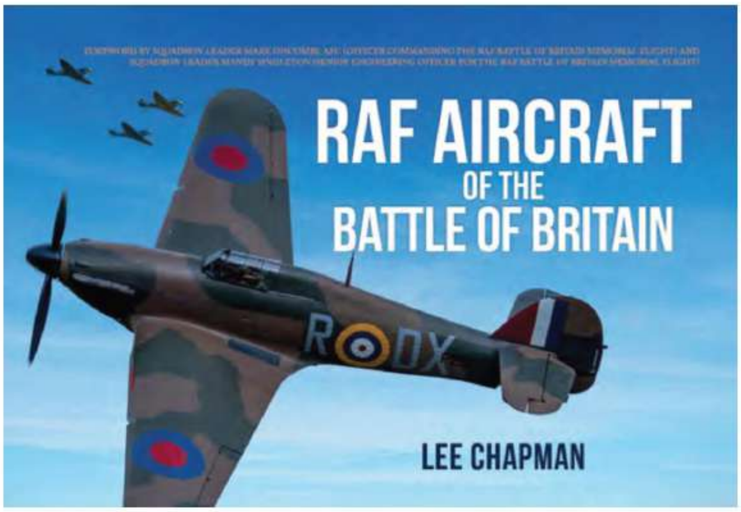

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COUNTDOWN TO VICTORY

Far East historian James Luto explores some of the key dates and events that would eventually lead to Japan's defeat and an Allied victory in the Pacific.

MAIN PICTURE: American firepower in action in the Pacific as a US battleship, USS *Indiana*, fires a salvo on a salvo during the bombardment at Kamaishi, Honshu, Japan, in July 1945. (USNHHC)

1943

APRIL

18 Admiral Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Japanese Combined Fleet, was killed when his aircraft was shot down by US P-38 Lightnings during a tour of the South Pacific. American code breakers had decrypted a message detailing his itinerary and the aircraft in which he was flying was intercepted and shot down near Bougainville in the Solomon Islands.

21 President Roosevelt announced that the Japanese had executed several airmen captured in the Doolittle Raid; earlier, on the 13th, the Japanese declared that captured Allied pilots will be given "one-way tickets to hell".

MAY

11 US troops invaded Attu in the Aleutian Islands, marking the start of the only land battle of the war fought on American soil.

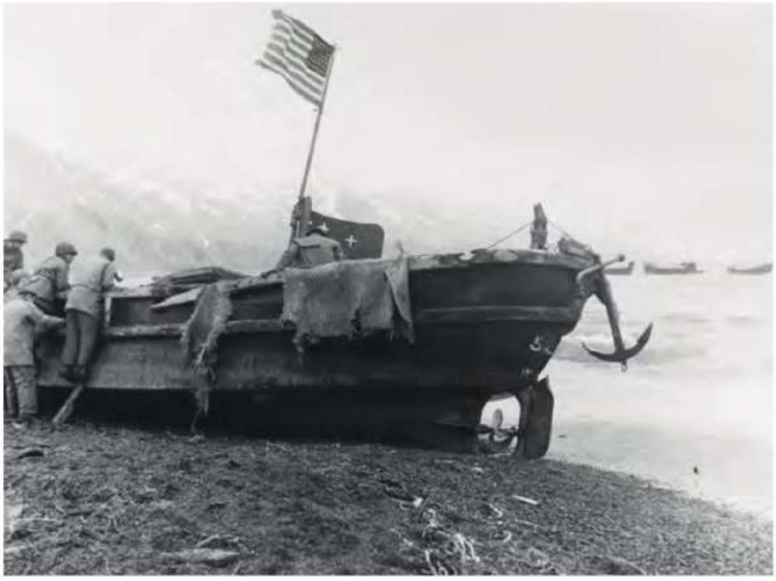
30 The Battle of Attu ended with the defeat of the Japanese, signalling the end of their occupation of the Aleutian Islands.

JUNE

20 The Allies commenced operations against the Japanese forces on New Georgia in the Solomon Islands.

JULY

8 B-24 Liberators flying from Midway bombed Japanese positions on Wake Island.



LEFT: The first American fag to fly over Attu Island was erected on the conning shield of this abandoned Japanese landing craft during the US landings on May 11, 1943. (USNHHC)

AUGUST

6/7 US Naval forces engaged four Japanese destroyers in Vella Gulf. The latter were attempting to reinforce and resupply the Japanese garrison on Kolombangara in the Solomons. Three of the enemy warships were sunk.

OCTOBER

7 Australian and American forces completed the capture of New Georgia.

7 Fearing a US invasion, Rear Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara, commander of the Japanese garrison on Wake Island, ordered the execution of ninety-six captive American civilian prisoners.

NOVEMBER

1 US, Australian, New Zealand and Fijian forces commenced operations to recapture Bougainville in the Solomon Islands.

2 During the troop landings on Bougainville, Allied naval forces clashed with those of the Japanese at the Battle of Empress Augusta Bay. One Japanese cruiser and one destroyer were sunk.

20 US troops invaded Makin and Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands, securing the islands three days later.

22 US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Republic of China's Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek met in Cairo to discuss a strategy to defeat Japan.

DECEMBER

15 US forces commenced their assault upon the Japanese on the Island of New Britain, with the objective of capturing the important Japanese base at Rabaul.

1944

JANUARY

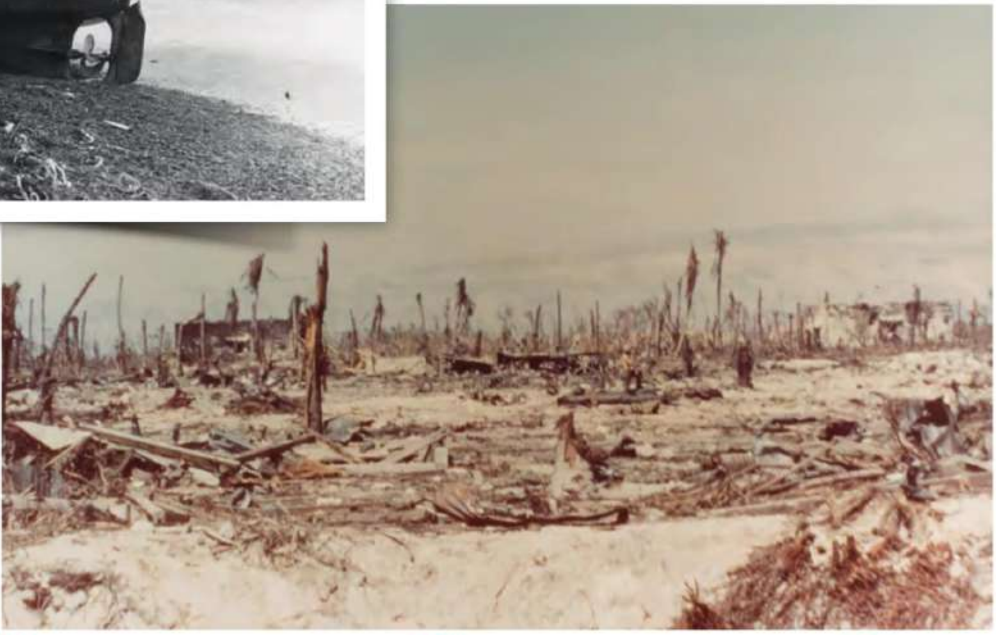
9 British and Indian troops recaptured the small port of Maungdaw in Burma.

31 American forces invaded the Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

FEBRUARY

3 US forces completed the liberation of Kwajalein.

5 The second Chindit expedition was launched into northern Burma.



ABOVE: The scene ashore on Namur Island, on February 10, 1944, after its liberation by US Marines. (USNHHC)

17/18 In Operation *Hailstone*, US carrier-based aircraft destroyed the Japanese naval base at Truk in the Caroline Islands, sinking more than forty ships and destroying at least 250 aircraft.

20 US carrier-based and land-based aircraft destroyed the Japanese base at Rabaul.

MARCH

6 The Japanese launched Operation *U-Go*, in which the Japanese 15th Army advanced against India's north-east frontier to forestall a planned British invasion of Burma. They aimed to capture the British supply bases on the Imphal Plain and cut the road linking Dimapur and Imphal at Kohima.

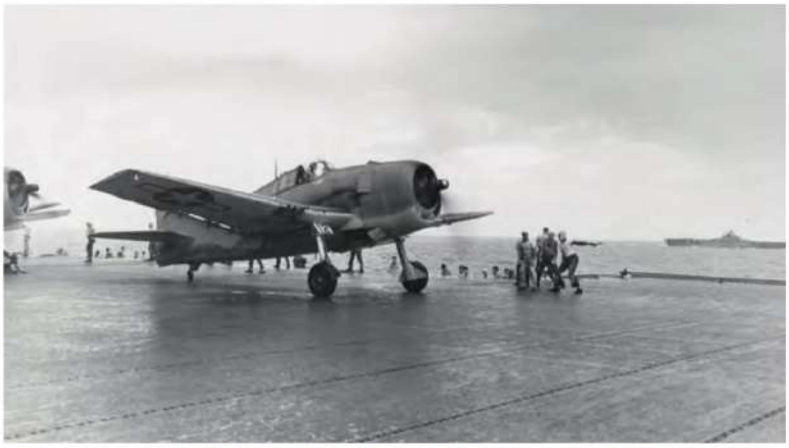
8 The Japanese Siege of Imphal began.

APRIL

4 The Battle of *Kohima*, the turning point of the Japanese *U-Go* offensive into India, began.

17 The Japanese began their last offensive in China, attacking US air bases in eastern China.

22 Allied forces commenced their Western New Guinea campaign, with landings at Aitape and Hollandia. »



LEFT: A Grumman F6F-3 Hellcat of VF-9 is given the go-ahead to take-off from USS *Essex* on the first day of operations against Japanese shipping at Truk, February 17, 1944. (USNHHC)

ABOVE: Japanese shipping under aerial attack in Truk Lagoon, as seen from an aircraft from USS *Intrepid*, on the first day of the US attacks, February 17, 1944. (USNHHC)

JUNE

15 US Marines invaded Saipan in the Mariana Islands.

15/16 B-29 Superfortress bombers fly from forward bases in China to attack the Imperial Iron and Steel Works at Yawata. This is the first bombing raid on Japan since the Doolittle raid of April 1942.

19 During the operations to capture Saipan, the 'Marianas Turkey Shoot' took place as US carrier-based fighters shot down 220 Japanese aircraft, losing only twenty of their own number.

22 The Battle of Kohima, often referred to as the "Stalingrad of the East", ended in a decisive Allied victory when British and Indian troops from Kohima and Imphal met at Milestone 109.

JULY

2 In an attempt to help its forces withdraw in Burma, the Japanese 33rd Army attacked Allied positions in the Sittang Bend. Aware of the enemy's break-out attempt, the British were waiting. In the ensuing battle, described as "the last significant land battle of the Western powers in the Second World War" and which ended on August 7, around 14,000 Japanese were lost, with well over half being killed. British forces suffered only 95 killed and 322 wounded.

8 The Japanese withdrew from Imphal, having suffered more than 50,000 casualties.

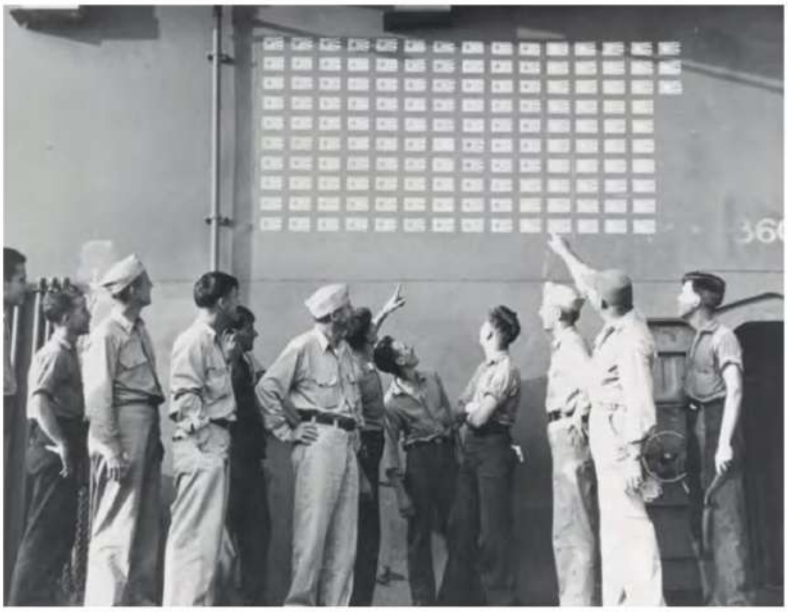
21 US Marines invaded Guam in the Marianas.

24 US Marines landed on Tinian.

AUGUST

8 American troops completed the capture of the Mariana Islands.

RIGHT: A Japanese bomb explodes close alongside USS *Bunker Hill* during the opening phases of the Battle of the Philippine Sea, June 19, 1944. (US Navy)



RIGHT: Officers and crewman admire the Japanese flags painted on the island of the carrier USS *Lexington*. *They* denote the 143 'kills' claimed by her air group during the 'Great Marianas Turkey Shoot', which was the aerial part of the Battle of The Philippine Sea. The picture was taken on June 21, 1944. (USNHHC)

SEPTEMBER

15 US Marines landed on Peleliu in the Palau Islands.

OCTOBER

12 The first B-29 Superfortress arrived on Saipan.

18 Fourteen B-29s based on the Marianas attacked the Japanese base at Truk.

20 The US Sixth Army invaded Leyte in the Philippines.

23-26 During the landings on Leyte, US and Japanese naval forces clashed at the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the largest naval battle in history. The Japanese were decisively beaten. During the battle, on October 25, the first organised Kamikaze attacks were delivered against Allied warships.

NOVEMBER

3 The Japanese launched their *fūsen bakudan* fire balloon campaign against the continental United States. At the time they were the longest ranged attacks ever conducted in the history of warfare, a record which was not broken until Operation Black Buck raids of the Falklands War in 1982.
24 Twenty-four B-29s bombed the Nakajima aircraft factory near Tokyo.

LEFT: **The first wave of assault troops land at Ramree Island on January 21, 1945. These men are from the 25th or 26th Indian Divisions. The Battle of Ramree Island was fought for six weeks during January and February 1945, as part of the Indian XV Corps' offensive on the Southern Front of the Burma Campaign.** (James Luto Collection)

1945

JANUARY

3 In preparation for the planned assaults against Iwo Jima, Okinawa and Japan itself, General MacArthur was placed in command of all US ground forces and Admiral Nimitz in command of all naval forces.

MIDDLE LEFT: **A bulldozer landing on the shore of Lingayen Gulf in the Philippines, January 29, 1945.** (USNHHC)

3 British troops occupied Akyab island in Burma.
9 The US Sixth Army invaded Lingayen Gulf on Luzon in the Philippines.
28 The Burma road linking Burma with the southwest of China, which had been cut by the Japanese in 1942, was reopened.

FEBRUARY

3 The US Sixth Army began its assault upon Manila.
16 US personnel recaptured Bataan in the Philippines.
19 The American landings on Iwo Jima began.

MARCH

2 US airborne forces, supported by amphibious landings, recaptured Corregidor in the Philippines.
3 US and Filipino troops liberated Manila.
9/10 Under Operation *Meetinghouse*, large areas of Tokyo were destroyed by fire during a devastating raid by a large force of B-29s operating from the Marians, using mostly napalm incendiary bombs. This is considered to be the single most destructive bombing raid in human history.
10 The US Eighth Army invaded Mindanao island in the Philippines.
20 British and Indian troops of the Fourteenth Army liberated Mandalay in Burma.

APRIL

1 The US Tenth Army launched its invasion of Okinawa.
7 B-29s flew their first fighter-escorted mission against Japan using P-51 Mustangs based on Iwo Jima.
7 US carrier-based fighters sank the battleship *Yamato* and several escort vessels which were sailing to attack US forces at Okinawa.
12 President Roosevelt died of a brain haemorrhage. He was succeeded by Harry S Truman.

MAY

2 Troops of the Indian 26th Division began occupying the city of Rangoon.
5 The Japanese fire balloons claimed their only victims in the continental USA – six people, one woman and five children, in Bly, Oregon.
16 The Battle of the Malacca Strait, a Royal Navy victory, ends with the sinking of the Japanese cruiser *Haguro*.
20 Japanese forces began their withdrawal from China.
25 The US Joint Chiefs of Staff approved Operation *Olympic*, the first part of the invasion of Japan. It was scheduled for November 1.
18 Japanese resistance ended on Mindanao in the Philippines.
22 Organised Japanese resistance ended on Okinawa. »

BELOW: **Members of the RAF's Advance Assault Party pictured on Ramree Island examining a dummy Japanese tank.** (James Luto Collection)

BOTTOM: **Landing craft on the beach at Akyab Island, during the Arakan Campaign, January 4, 1945.** (James Luto Collection)

COUNTDOWN TO VICTORY

ABOVE: To the right, with his characteristic corncob pipe in his mouth, General MacArthur is pictured with other senior Army officers upon his arrival at Atsugi airdrome, near Tokyo, on August 30, 1945. (NARA)

JUNE

1 With the atomic bomb program nearly concluded, President Truman's advisers, the Interim Committee, recommended use of the weapon as soon as possible.
13 Australian forces liberated Brunei.

JULY

5 MacArthur's headquarters announced the liberation of Philippines, though sporadic fighting continued until the end of the war.
14 The first US naval bombardment of Japanese home islands took place against Honshu and Hokkaido.
16 The first atomic bomb was successfully tested at the Alamogordo Test Range in New Mexico.
17 The Potsdam Conference began in Berlin. The joint declaration that was issued reiterated the call for Japan's unconditional surrender.
17 British and American battleships shelled *Honshu*, the largest and most populous main island of Japan.
25 President Truman approved the schedule to deploy the atomic bombs against Japan.
26 Components of the atomic bomb *Little Boy* were unloaded from the USS cruiser *Indianapolis* at Tinian Island in the South Pacific.
26 Whilst participating in minesweeping duties off Thailand as part of Operation *Livery*, the minesweeper HMS *Vestal* was hit by a kamikaze. The ship was so badly damaged that she was scuttled. HMS *Vestal* was the last Royal Navy ship to be lost because of enemy action in the Second World War.
27 Japan's government rejected the terms of the Potsdam Declaration.
29 A Japanese submarine sank the USS *Indianapolis* after it had left Tinian on its way to the Philippines, resulting in the loss of 881 crewmen. The ship sinks before a radio message could be sent out, leaving survivors adrift for two days.

AUGUST

6 The atomic bomb *Little Boy* was dropped on Hiroshima from the B-29 *Enola Gay* flown by Colonel Paul Tibbets. An estimated 90,000 to 120,000 Japanese were killed.
8 The USSR declared war on Japan.
9 Soviet forces launched the last campaign of the Second World War and invaded Manchuria.
9 The second atomic bomb, *Fat Man*, was dropped on Nagasaki.
9 Three million leaflets urging the Japanese to surrender are dropped by US aircraft.
10 Having called an imperial conference of all of his high-level advisers, Emperor Hirohito and Japanese Prime Minister Suzuki decided to seek an immediate peace with the Allies.
14 Hirohito recorded his surrender announcement to the Japanese nation.
15 Despite a last-minute coup attempt, at 12.00 hours, Emperor Hirohito delivered a pre-recorded radio broadcast informing his people that he has accepted the Allies' terms as agreed at the Potsdam Conference. The word 'surrender' was never used.
15 Around the world, crowds celebrated Victory over Japan Day.
15 Prime Minister Clement Atlee announced that, "The last of our enemies is laid low".
16 At 16.00 hours Hirohito issued the order commanding "the entire armed forces of his nation to halt their fighting immediately".
28 The first Allied troops set foot on the soil of the Japanese home islands, whilst Allied warships arrive in Tokyo Bay.
28 Operation *Birdcage* launched from bases in Ceylon, Cocos Islands, Bengal and Burma. This was an Allied aerial programme of leaflet drops onto prisoner of war camps in South-East Asia, the intention being to inform the PoWs of the Japanese surrender and the next steps to be taken.
30 A Royal Navy force liberated Hong Kong.

SEPTEMBER

2 The formal Japanese surrender ceremony took place on board the battleship USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay. The Second World War was at an end.
3 Japanese forces in the Philippines surrendered.
4 The Japanese garrison on Wake Island surrendered. Its commander, Rear Admiral Shigematsu Sakaibara, was later found guilty of war crimes for the murder of the American prisoners in 1943. He was executed at Guam in 1947.
5 Singapore was officially liberated by British and Indian troops.
8 General MacArthur, recently appointed Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, entered Tokyo.
9 Japanese forces in Korea surrendered.
13 Japanese forces in Burma surrendered.
30 A total of 53,700 former PoWs and internees had been evacuated to Australia, India and the UK by this date, the total rising to 71,000 by the end of October.

ABOVE: Japanese troops being moved under guard to a prisoner of war camp in Hong Kong, September 1945. (Historic Military Press)

RIGHT: The Japanese surrender being formally ratified on USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on September 2, 1945. (NARA)

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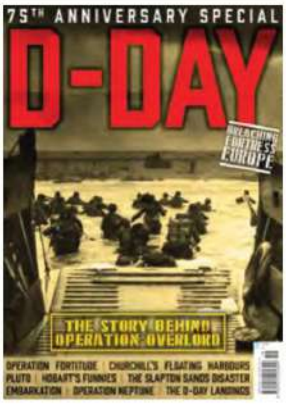

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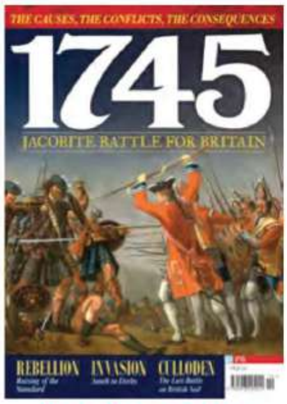

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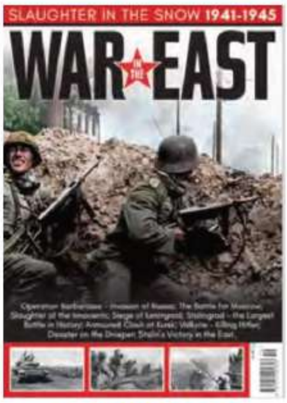

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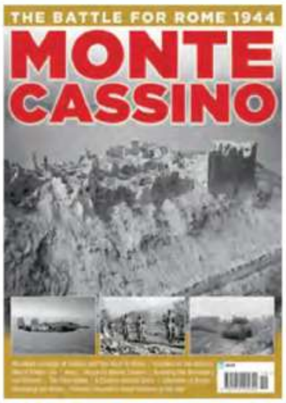

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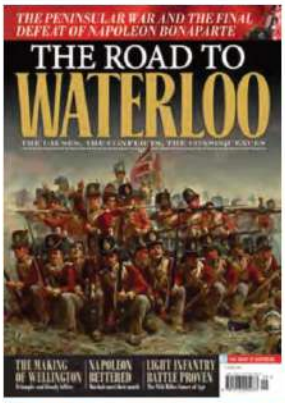

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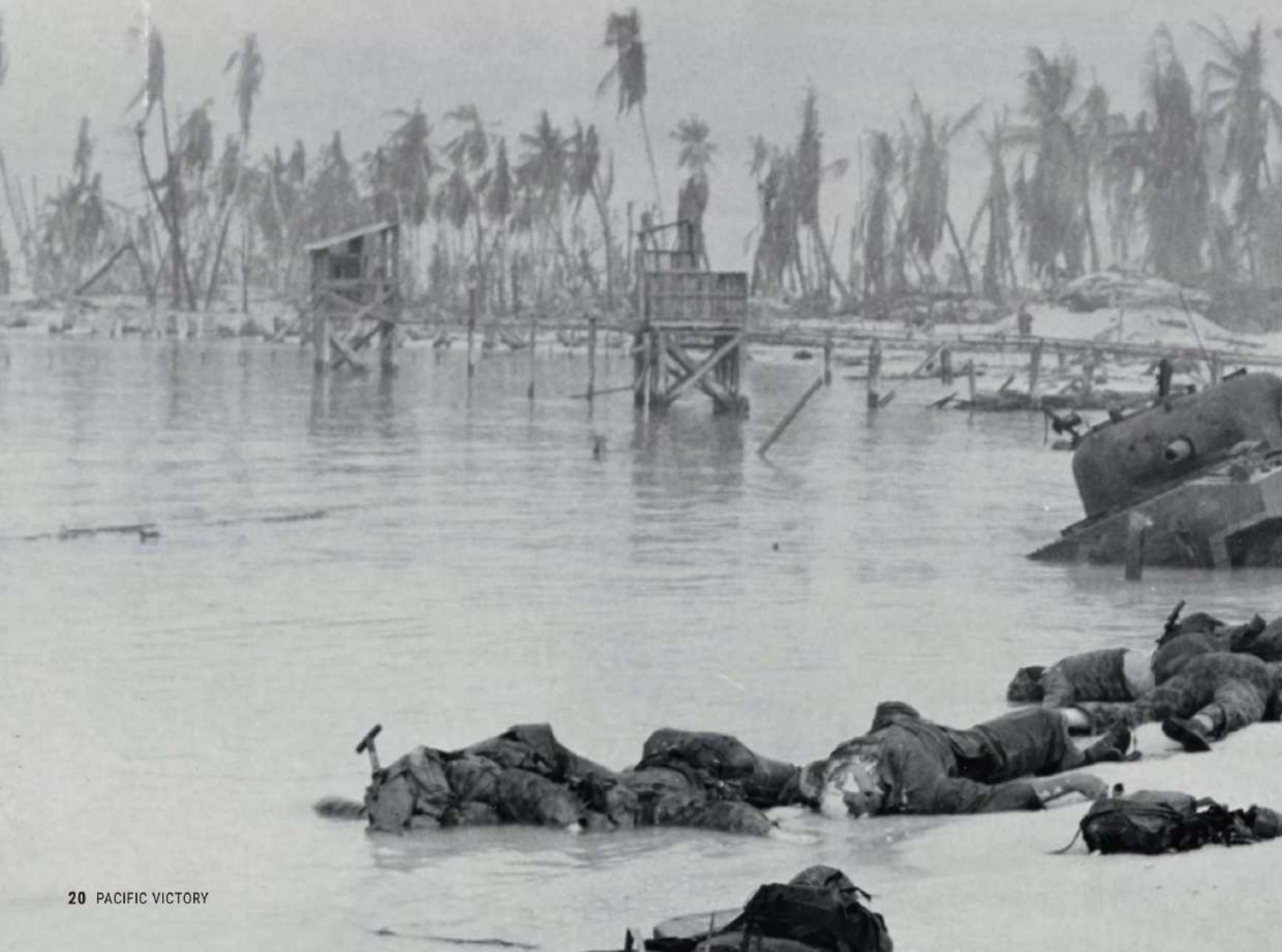
TERRIBLE TARAWA

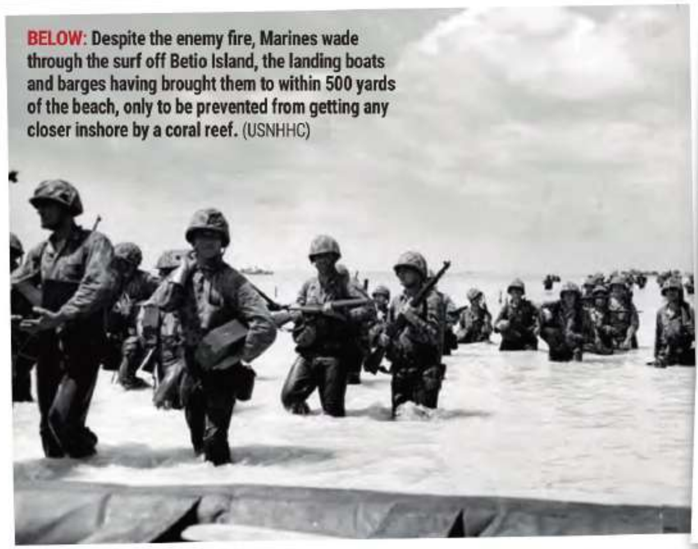
Tarawa was one of the smallest islands ever attacked by US Marines. In the course of just seventy-six hours it became one of the most blood-soaked in the Pacific.

BELOW: The bloody aftermath of the Battle of Tarawa. The bodies of US Marines lie at the water's edge on one of the Betio Island landing beaches, November 22, 1943. Two resting Marines are sat on an M-4 Sherman tank. (USNHHC)

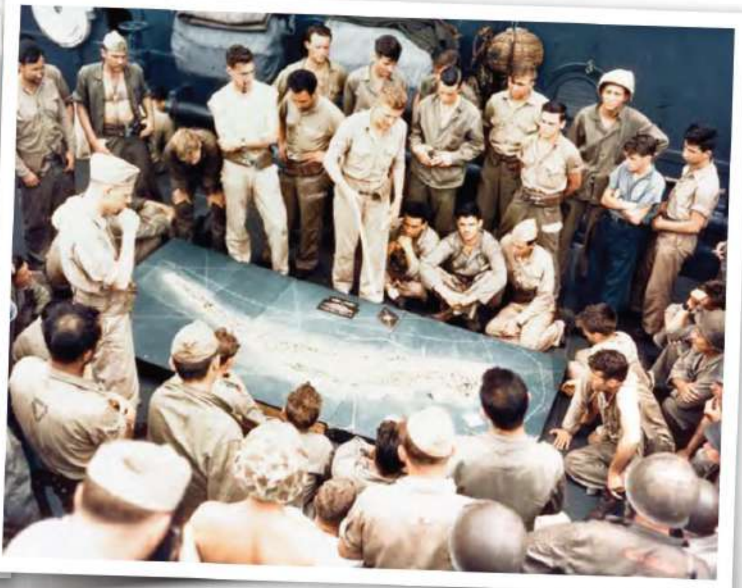
At the Quadrant Conference in Quebec in August 1943, the specific routes of the advance on Japan were laid out. One of those paths was that followed by General MacArthur from the South Pacific through the Philippines. The other passed up through the Central Pacific with the aim of capturing the Mariana Islands, which represent the southern part of a submerged mountain range that extends 1,565 miles from *Guam* to near Japan. From the Mariana Islands, American bombers would be able to bomb Tokyo.

With the pacification of Rabaul in hand, in late November 1943 the journey which would take US forces to the Marianas could begin. The first stage of this plan was the capture of the Marshall Islands, but the Marshalls were cut off from direct communications with Hawaii by a Japanese garrison and air base on the small island of Betio, on the western side of Tarawa Atoll in the Gilbert Islands. The capture of the





BELOW: Despite the enemy fire, Marines wade through the surf off Betio Island, the landing boats and barges having brought them to within 500 yards of the beach, only to be prevented from getting any closer inshore by a coral reef. (USNHHC)



ABOVE: US Marines and sailors study a relief model of Betio Island, Tarawa, while en route to launch Operation *Galvanic*. (USNHHC)

Gilberts would also allow the US to occupy and use airfields which the Japanese had constructed, as well as shorten the supply route to the south and southwest areas of the Pacific. Tarawa, therefore, became the first of Admiral Chester W Nimitz's targets. Little could he have imagined what was to come.

OPERATION GALVANIC

Tarawa is an atoll located approximately 2,500 miles southwest of Hawaii. It consists of a series of coral islets that stretch through the ocean in a hook-like fashion. The largest of Tarawa's islets is Betio. With its highest point being only ten feet above sea level, Betio is a fraction above two miles in length and just 800 yards in width. It was on this small stretch of land that the Japanese had concentrated all their strength in Tarawa, constructing an airstrip defended by a garrison of 4,700 troops occupying a labyrinth of pillboxes and bunkers interconnected by tunnels and defended by wire and mines. »

ABOVE LEFT: **US Marines snatch a brief rest on one of the landing beaches on Betio Island, Tarawa, whilst casualties are removed to ships waiting offshore, as the invasion, Operation *Galvanic* continues.** (USNHHC)

ABOVE RIGHT: **Marines rest beside an LVT on the beach at Tarawa during the landings in November 1943.** (USNHHC)

BELOW: **The ships of Task Force 53 pictured en route to Tarawa just prior to the landings on November 20, 1943.** (USNHHC)

The Japanese had hundreds of guns, among them a system of heavy machine-guns protected by logs, sand, concrete and armoured plate. There were also fourteen coast defence guns, all with underground ammunition storage and fire control systems, twenty-five 37mm and 75mm field guns, in shelters that were immune to direct hits from all but the largest guns, and an unknown number of anti-aircraft guns.

The defenders on Betio had also built a system of bombproof shelters made of coconut logs braced with angle irons. The roofs of these shelters were at least six feet thick and covered over with sand, logs and corrugated iron. Only heavy-calibre armour-piercing or other delayed-action shells could penetrate them. These shelters were also split into compartments, so that some of the occupants enjoyed protection from grenades and explosives hurled through the openings.

Surrounded by a barrier reef, Betio presented a serious challenge to amphibious landing craft, which would ground on the reef if the tide depth was not sufficient enough to allow them to cross. Furthermore, the water around the island was rife with mines, barbed wire and barricades designed to divert landing craft into lanes that were heavily covered by artillery.

Altogether, the Japanese had some 500 pillboxes, bunkers and other strong points on the small island and because of the flat terrain the majority of the enemy weapons could engage targets in all directions. Tarawa was the most heavily defended atoll that would ever be invaded by Allied forces in the Pacific.[1] The task of capturing this tiny island, under what was codenamed Operation *Galvanic*, fell to the Marines of the 2nd Division. The resulting struggle produced one of the fiercest and bloodiest battles in the Marine Corps' history.

"RED BALL OF FIRE"

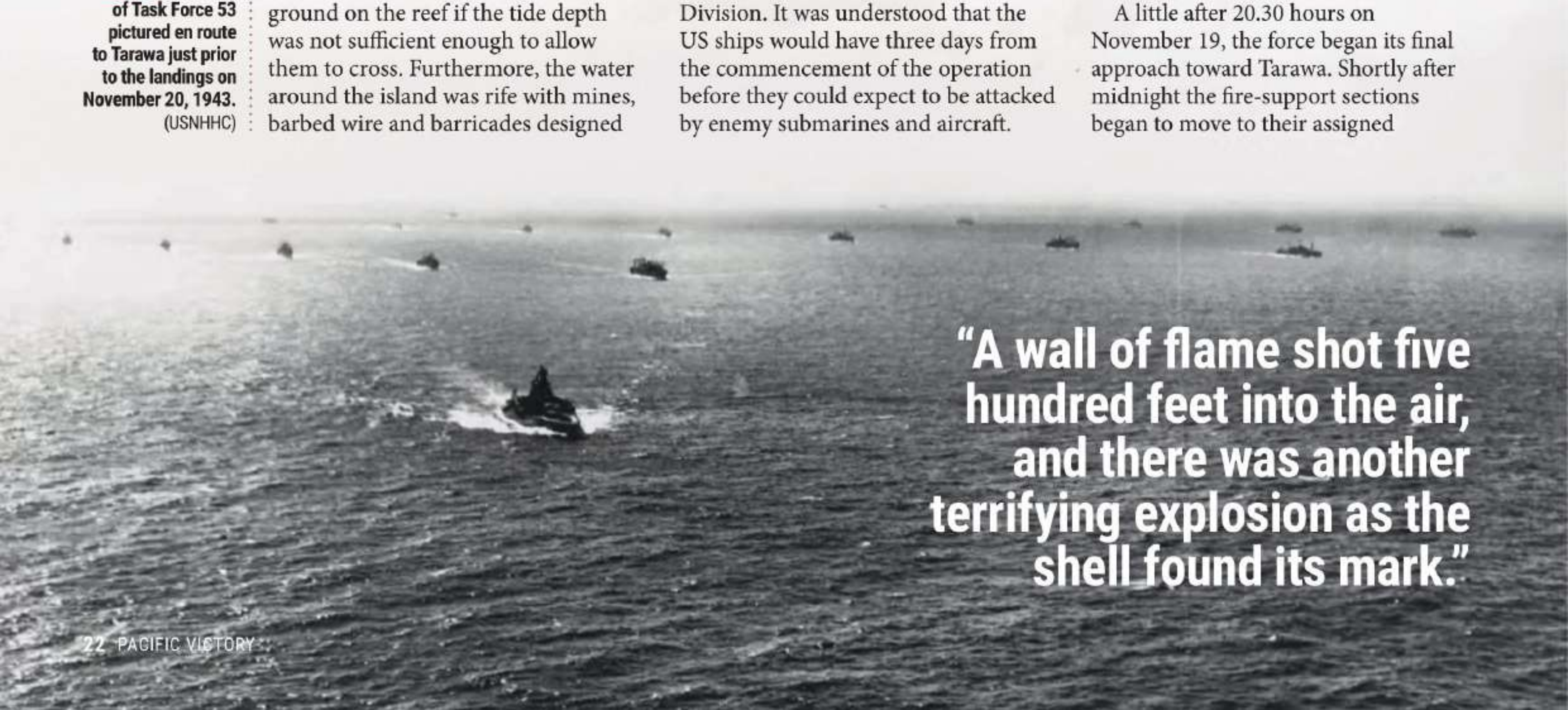
The capture of the Tarawa Atoll was assigned to Rear Admiral Harry Hill's Task Force 53. The actual landing force for the capture of Betio was to be the Fifth Amphibious Corps, which was under the command of Major General Julian C Smith, its main component being the 2nd Marine Division. It was understood that the US ships would have three days from the commencement of the operation before they could expect to be attacked by enemy submarines and aircraft.

In fact, because of the heavy aircraft losses suffered at Rabaul the Japanese in Tarawa could only expect help from a small number of submarines. The defenders simply had to resist the invaders as best they could.

The force committed to the capture of the tiny island was huge, with 18,000 Marines backed by the 27th Infantry Division and a fleet which included five escort carriers, three battleships and forty-six other warships, transports and landing craft. The plan of attack was a pre-dawn bombard of the island before the first three waves of Marines were carried ashore over the reef on amphibian tractors, or LVTs (Landing Vehicle, Tracked).

The various elements of Task Force 53 assembled at Efate in the New Hebrides, sailing from there to Tarawa on November 13, 1943. En route, the marines were informed of their destination and told by Hill that, "This is the first American assault of a strongly defended atoll and with northern attack and covering forces, the largest Pacific operation to date."

A little after 20.30 hours on November 19, the force began its final approach toward Tarawa. Shortly after midnight the fire-support sections began to move to their assigned



"A wall of flame shot five hundred feet into the air, and there was another terrifying explosion as the shell found its mark."

stations. There was a delay in opening the barrage against Betio due to confusion during the marshalling of the transports and the unloading of the marines into the assault craft. As a result, H-Hour had to be put back. Consequently, the first shots in the Battle of Tarawa were fired by the Japanese.

The response from the US Navy was almost instantaneous, the 16-inch guns of the battleships USS *Maryland* and USS *Colorado* hammering the Japanese batteries. The fire-support sections were already in position and they quickly joined in the bombardment. Embedded with the Marines, onboard the US Navy transport *Blue Fox*, was war correspondent Robert Sherrod: "We heard a great thud in the southwest. We knew what that meant. The first battleship had fired the first shot. We all rushed out on deck. The show had begun…

"Within three minutes the sky was filled again with the orange-red flash of the big gun… The red ball of fire that was the high-explosive shell was again dropping toward the horizon. But this time there was a tremendous burst on the land that was Betio. A wall of flame shot five hundred feet into the air, and there was another terrifying explosion as the shell found its mark. Hundreds of awestruck Marines on the deck of the *Blue Fox* cheered in uncontrollable joy.

"The next flash was four times as great, and the sky turned a brighter, redder orange, greater than any flash of lightning the Marines had ever seen. Now four shells, weighing more than a ton each, peppered the island. Now Betio began to glow brightly from the fires the bombardment pattern had started."[2]

At 05.52 hours, the bombardment ceased, as the Navy's aircraft took over the attack. While the aircraft waited for the dust to settle after the bombardment, there was a welcome respite for the Japanese of around thirty minutes, during which time the defenders were able to fire on the invasion fleet unmolested. But the aircraft were behind schedule and the order was given for the warships to recommence their shelling of the island. Finally, at 06.15 hours on the 20th, the planes moved in for the air strike.

The aerial attack only lasted around ten minutes, the aircraft aiming to level all the undamaged buildings so that they could not be used as strongpoints by the enemy. This was only partially achieved. As the last of the aircraft

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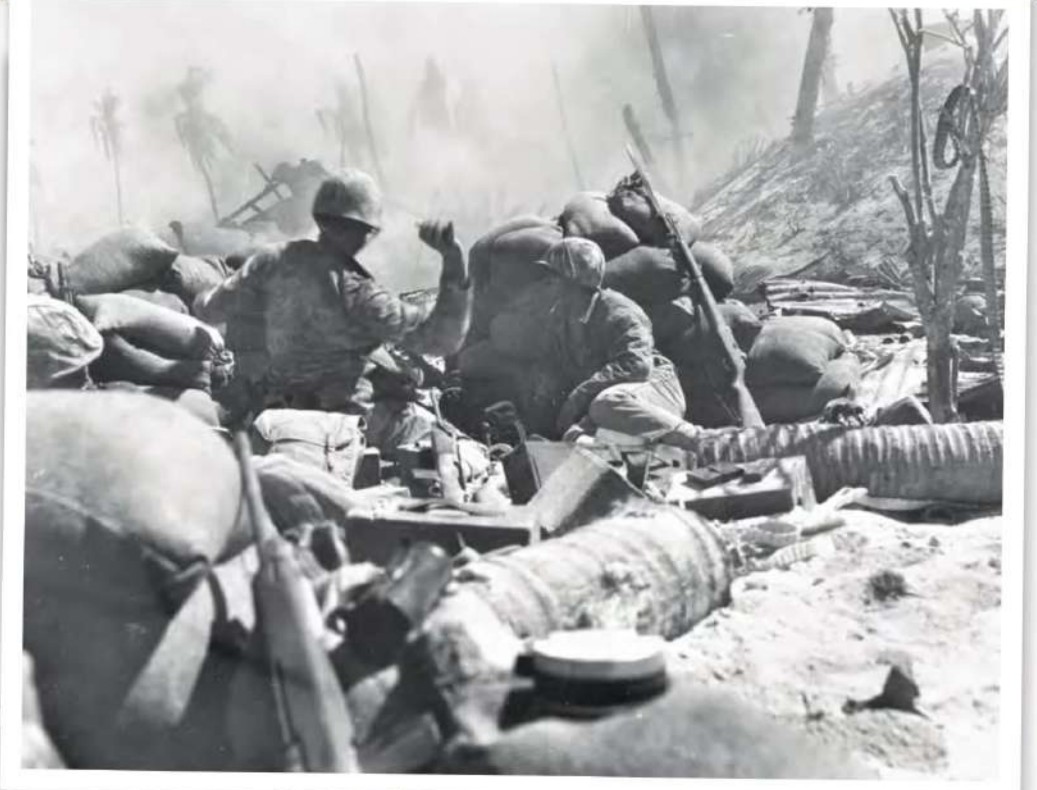
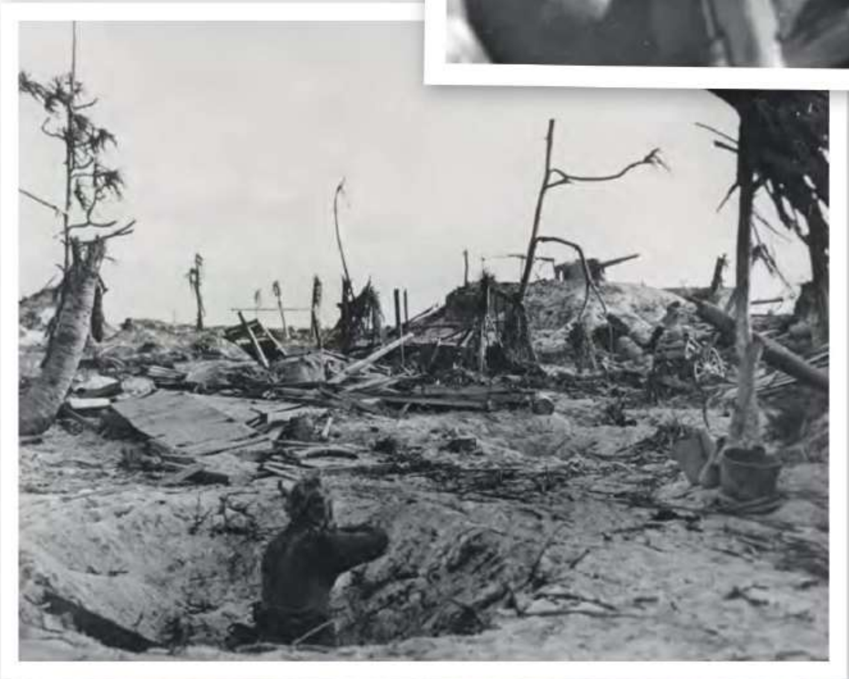


ABOVE: **A Marine throws a grenade at the enemy during the fight for Betio Island. Note the sand hill at far right, possibly a Japanese defensive position, and the bayonet on the M-1 rifle on the right.** (USNHHC)



LEFT: **A Marine takes aim at a Japanese sniper during fighting on Betio Island on November 20-23, 1943. Note the heavy coastal defence guns on the right.** (USNHHC)

LEFT: **The view looking over the battlefield, from the head of the pier on Betio Island, towards the Japanese positions as the Marines fight to dislodge the enemy from strongpoints around the airfield, November 22, 1943. Note the wrecked truck and other equipment beyond the Marines.** (USNHHC)

ABOVE LEFT: US Marines, pictured on South Beach on November 22, pass some of the Japanese defences that they and their comrades faced during the landings on Tarawa. (National Museum of the US Navy)

ABOVE RIGHT: A Marine cautiously inspects a Japanese tank which was dug in and used as a pillbox. In the foreground, a dead Japanese soldier lies where he fell. (National Museum of the US Navy)

BELOW: Blood plasma is given to a wounded Marine at an aid station on a beach on Betio Island, November 22, 1943. (USNHHC)

flew off back to their carriers, the ships took up their bombardment again. But by this time the air was thick with smoke and dust and individual targets ashore could not be picked out.

IT WAS RED HOT

Sunrise on the morning of Saturday, November 20, 1943, was at 06.12 hours. A few minutes later the minesweeper USS *Pursuit* started to sweep the channel leading into the lagoon, with two destroyers, *Ringgold* and *Dashiell*, in support. *Pursuit* came under fire from the shore, but the destroyers quickly silenced the Japanese guns.

Behind *Pursuit* and two other US minesweepers should have been the first wave of amphibious tractors, but these were found to be twenty-five minutes behind schedule. H-Hour had to be put back yet again, this time to 08.45. But the tractors were moving against a head wind and were making slow progress, and H-Hour was rescheduled for a third time – until 09.00 hours.

Carrier aircraft, therefore, took to the skies again, strafing the landing beaches at 08.30 while naval gunfire continued to send salvo after salvo into the smoky, burning island of Betio. At 08.54 hours the order was given by Admiral Hill to cease all naval gunfire except for the destroyers inside the lagoon and they were instructed to keep firing until the Marines were at risk of being hit. Twenty-three minutes were to elapse during which the amphibian tractors moved slowly toward the beaches without a covering barrage of naval gunfire except from the two destroyers and without any aerial cover.

There was a good reason, of course, for the cease-fire order. Admiral Hill and General Smith, on USS *Maryland*, could see neither the island nor the leading wave of tractors due to the heavy blanket of smoke that hung between the ship and the island. It would have been to invite disaster had the naval gunfire continued without exact knowledge of the position of the first wave of assault troops. The planes made one more strafing run when the tractors were about halfway up the beach.

In the face of the approaching Marines, the Japnese coastal defence guns on Betio were silent, the guns destroyed or their crews killed. Most of the dual-purpose anti-aircraft guns had also been neutralized. Unfortunately, few of the smaller beach defence guns or pillboxes were destroyed.

Arnold Gladson was serving in Weapons Company, 2nd Battalion, 2nd Marines: "The amphibs are now lining up to go in. We are following about 2,500 yards behind. Destroyers are moving in close and are laying down a barrage on the beach. The first and second wave have started the run for the beach. Planes from the carriers are bombing and strafing the beach. We are told to get down in the boat. I have an empty feeling in my stomach. There seemed to be no opposition for a while. About 800 yards out from the beach all hell broke loose.

"We were supposed to be 6 minutes behind the first wave but when I got the nerve to stick my head out to look, we were even with them. Boat in front of us got hit. The sides just fell apart. Our people in the water trying to swim with all their gear. Many drowned.

"There are shells bursting near us. The coxswain was struck, a small fragment struck his helmet. Some fell in boat. It was red hot.

"Landing boats ahead of us and on our port side are taking hits. Some are on fire. The shelling was so heavy we were waved back. We turned around and headed back to open waters. We were fired on by small arms all the way back until we were out of range. We all stood up and looked around. Hard to describe. Boats were sunk or sinking, some burning, some out of control."[3]

Robert Sherrod completed his journey to the shore in on one of the amphibious tractors of the fifth wave: "No sooner

LEFT: The scene on a stretch of Red Beach on Betio Island after the end of the fighting. Note the abandoned LVTs in the foreground, and the pier in the background. (National Museum of the US Navy)

had we hit the water than the Jap machine guns really opened up on us. There must have been five or six of these machine guns concentrating their fire on us… It was painfully slow, wading in such deep water. And we had seven hundred yards to walk slowly into that machinegun fire, looming into larger targets as we rose onto higher ground. I was scared, as I had never been scared before… I noticed that bullets were hitting six inches to the left or six inches to the right. I could have sworn that I could have reached out and touched a hundred bullets."[4]

REINFORCEMENTS

Problems soon began to mount. Some of the amphibious tractors were unable to cross the reef and those that were able to run up the beach could not get beyond the sea wall. The senior officer of the forces ashore, Colonel David Shoup, was also receiving reports of very heavy casualties, with some officers doubtful the landing could succeed. But General Smith decided that a sufficient toe-hold had been made to risk sending in more troops.

The first of these was the 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines, but their Higgins boats grounded on the reef. The coxswains lowered the ramps and the men rushed out over the end to begin wading ashore. Unfortunately, the water was deep, well over a man's head in places, and some of the Marines, loaded with equipment, drowned.

Holding their weapons above their heads when they could, the men waded slowly in, sometimes stumbling in the potholes in the coral. The front lines were only a matter of a few feet inland from the water's edge, so close to the beach in fact that the troops began to fight immediately they walked out of the water and set foot ashore. Then, as the first thin lines pushed inland, men began to drop out, wounded or dying.

By noon the situation ashore began to clear up as some measure of order appeared in what had seemed chaos, but progress was slow, a matter of a few feet at a time, for the enemy kept the Marines pinned down. Attempts at landing tanks had not proved a great success, with some remaining stranded with their boat stuck on the reef and some sinking. Those that did manage to reach the beach helped the Marine's advance considerably, but many were quite quickly knocked out or succumbed to accidents.

Later in the day, attempts were made to land artillery, again with mixed results, but by nightfall, there were five sections of artillery ashore and they were ready to go into position at dawn. By the end of the first day, 5,000 Marines had been put ashore – but 1,500 of these men were either dead or wounded. »

THE USS LISCOME BAY

For its part in supporting Operation *Galvanic*, and reducing the threat of Japanese counterattacks, the US Navy also paid a heavy price for the victory at Tarawa. The threat of retaliatory action by Japanese submarines was proven well-founded by the events surrounding the escort carrier USS *Liscome Bay* on November 24, 1943.

At 05.10 hours, as aircraft were being readied for the day's operations, a lookout on the carrier's starboard side reported spotting a torpedo heading towards the ship. As *Liscome Bay* was conducting a turn, the torpedo, one of a spread of three fired by the Japanese submarine *I-175*, struck behind the engine room. Its explosion detonated the carrier's bomb-stowage magazine – with devastating results.

The rear third of *Liscome Bay* was obliterated in a blast that was felt throughout Task Force 53. Steaming nearly a mile away, the battleship USS *New Mexico* was showered with metal fragments, burning cloth and body parts, whilst a sailor on board the escort carrier USS *Coral Sea* was reportedly hit by a fire extinguisher blasted from *Liscome Bay*. US vessels up to five miles distant described being "sprayed with shrapnel". "It didn't look like a ship at all," recalled Lieutenant John Dix on the destroyer USS *Hoel*. "We thought it was an ammunition dump... She just went whoom – an orange ball of flame."

At 05.33 hours, only 23 minutes after the explosion, *Liscome Bay* listed to starboard and sank. Over fifty-three officers and 591 enlisted men went down with her, meaning that proportionately *Liscome Bay* suffered the highest number of casualties – 70 percent – of any US aircraft carrier in the whole of the Second World War.

"I was scared, as I had never been scared before."

BELOW: Pictured a few weeks after the Battle of Tarawa, this scene of one of the beaches on Betio Island includes a wrecked Japanese Type 95 Ha-Go light tank and three abandoned US Marine Corps LVT(1) amphibious vehicles, the latter lying where they were knocked out in the fighting in November 1943. (USNHHC)

BELOW: Prisoners under guard on Betio Island during the Battle of Tarawa. Such was the fanatical resistance offered by the defenders on Tarawa, that of the entire Japanese garrison, only one officer and sixteen enlisted men surrendered. Of the 1,200 Korean labourers brought to Tarawa to construct the defences, only 129 survived. All told, 4,690 of the island's garrison had been killed. (US Department of Defense)

BOTTOM: This battlefield cemetery, pictured at the end of November 1943, marks the last resting place of some of those Americans who fell in the Battle of Tarawa. (NARA)

The Marines' position was still precarious and a counter-attack by the Japanese under the cover of darkness was a dreaded possibility.

"WE ARE WINNING"

The counterattack did not materialise, which Smith believed was Rear Admiral Keiji Shibazaki's greatest error in the battle. At the time, it was thought that this may have been because his landlines had been cut by the bombing and shelling and he was unable to communicate with all his troops. Only later was it discovered that Shibazaki, along with most of his staff, had been killed, cut down whilst in the open during the initial US bombardment. With no direction from their headquarters, the Japanese simply had to stand and fight where they were. It is understood that around 300 Japanese committed suicide during the bombardment, possibly believing that they had to follow their commander into death.

As no counterattack had been attempted, the ground held by the Marines was not threatened. More reinforcements could therefore be fed onto the beaches during the morning of November 21.

After spending the night in their Higgins boats, the men, seasick, wet and scared, at last moved towards the shore, only for some to smash into the reef where they grounded. "The Japanese were zeroed in on that reef," recalled Staff Sergeant Norman Hatch. "It was almost uncanny to watch a ramp go down and a bunch of guys make a surge to come out and a shell explode right in their faces… Boats were blown completely out of the water and bodies were all over the place."[5]

The 1st Battalion, 2nd Marines reached the airfield and, along with a mixture of men from other battalions, was ordered to drive southwards. To support them, carrier-based aircraft came in to bomb and strafe the area south of the main airstrip. Early in the afternoon, companies of the 1st and 2nd battalions, 2nd Marines crossed the main runway and occupied the empty defensive positions along the south shore.

At the eastern end of the island, elements of the 6th Marine Regiment landed, following a report that the Japanese were retreating in that direction. As they landed, the Marines came under machine-gun fire, and so aerial support was called up. The Japanese were not retreating but had set up a strongpoint in a pillbox mounting twelve machine-guns. Inside the pillbox the Japanese had a small tank of gasoline and when it was hit with fire from the aircraft it exploded, and the entire position and its occupants were incinerated.

By the end of the day, the entire western end of the island was in American hands, as well most of the area around the airfield. At this point, Shoup sent his most positive signal of the battle so far: "Casualties many; percentage dead not known; combat efficiency: We are winning."

SUICIDAL ASSAULT

With large areas of the island under the control of the Marines, even more men, as well as heavy equipment and tanks, were ferried ashore on Day 3, November 22. With such powerful support, the Marines were able to advance steadily, driving the Japanese backwards until, by the end of the day, the enemy, with the exception of the group in front of the 1st Battalion, 8th Marines, was compressed into the long tail of Betio east of the air strip. If the Japanese ever intended to launch a counterattack, this was the night to do it.

Each night the Marines had dug in with the uneasy feeling that before morning the Japanese would stage a 'banzai' charge. So far, such a mad, suicidal, headlong rush had not come. That, though, was about to change.

At 19.30 hours, a body of around fifty Japanese soldiers probed the positions held by 1st Battalion, 6th Marines. This was repelled, as was another similar attempt at penetrating the line held by the Americans.

Then, at 04.00 hours on the 23rd, the Japanese finally made their move. It was truly a suicide mission, for they could only muster around 300 men, a force that had no possible hope of achieving anything which could determine the outcome of the battle they had already lost. Regardless of the obvious hopelessness of their actions, the Japanese charged to their deaths.

The whole affair was over in just one hour. In the front of the Marines' line lay the bodies of more than 200 enemy dead. Out beyond that were the patterns made by the artillery concentrations; this area was littered with the broken and battered bodies of approximately 125 Japanese, destroyed by the artillery.

With the Battle of Tarawa over, both sides had glimpsed the direction that the war in the Pacific would take. For the Japanese, they were about to get hit by the tsunami of American industrial might that Admiral Yamamoto had so feared. The Americans, too, had once again seen just what lay ahead on their journey towards the Japanese mainland. Indeed, an editorial in the *New York Times* on December 27, 1943 both praised the US Marines for overcoming the enemy's defences and fanatical garrison on Tarawa, but also warned that future landings in the Marshall Islands might well result in heavier losses. "We must steel ourselves now to pay that price," the paper concluded, for at Tarawa the Japanese had proven once again that they were still more than capable of inflicting painful losses.

FAR LEFT (OPPOSITE PAGE): **Taken on November 24, 1943, this aerial view of Betio Island was taken looking north towards "The Pocket", the last place of Japanese resistance. Two 12.7mm anti-aircraft guns are visible in the lower left.** (US National Museum of Naval Aviation)

BELOW LEFT: **The fighting over, US Marines inspect what are, according to the original caption, captured British "8-inch Vickers naval guns brought from Singapore".** (USMC Archives)

BELOW: **A relic of the bitter fighting in November 1943 – one of the Japanese coastal defence guns that can still be seen on Tarawa today.** (Nava Fedaeff/ Shutterstock)

NOTES:

1. See L C Kukral, *The Invasion of Tarawa* (Navy & Marine Corps World War II Commemorative Committee Navy Office of Information, The Pentagon, Washington D.C.).
2. Robert Sherrod, *Tarawa: The Story of a Battle* (Duell, Sloane and Pearce, New York, 1944), p.61.
3. Quoted from www.tarawaontheweb.org/gladson.htm.
4. Sherrod, op. cit. p.68.
5. Quoted in Donald L Miller, *D-Days in the Pacific* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 2005), p.111.

THE MYSTERIOUS MARSHALLS

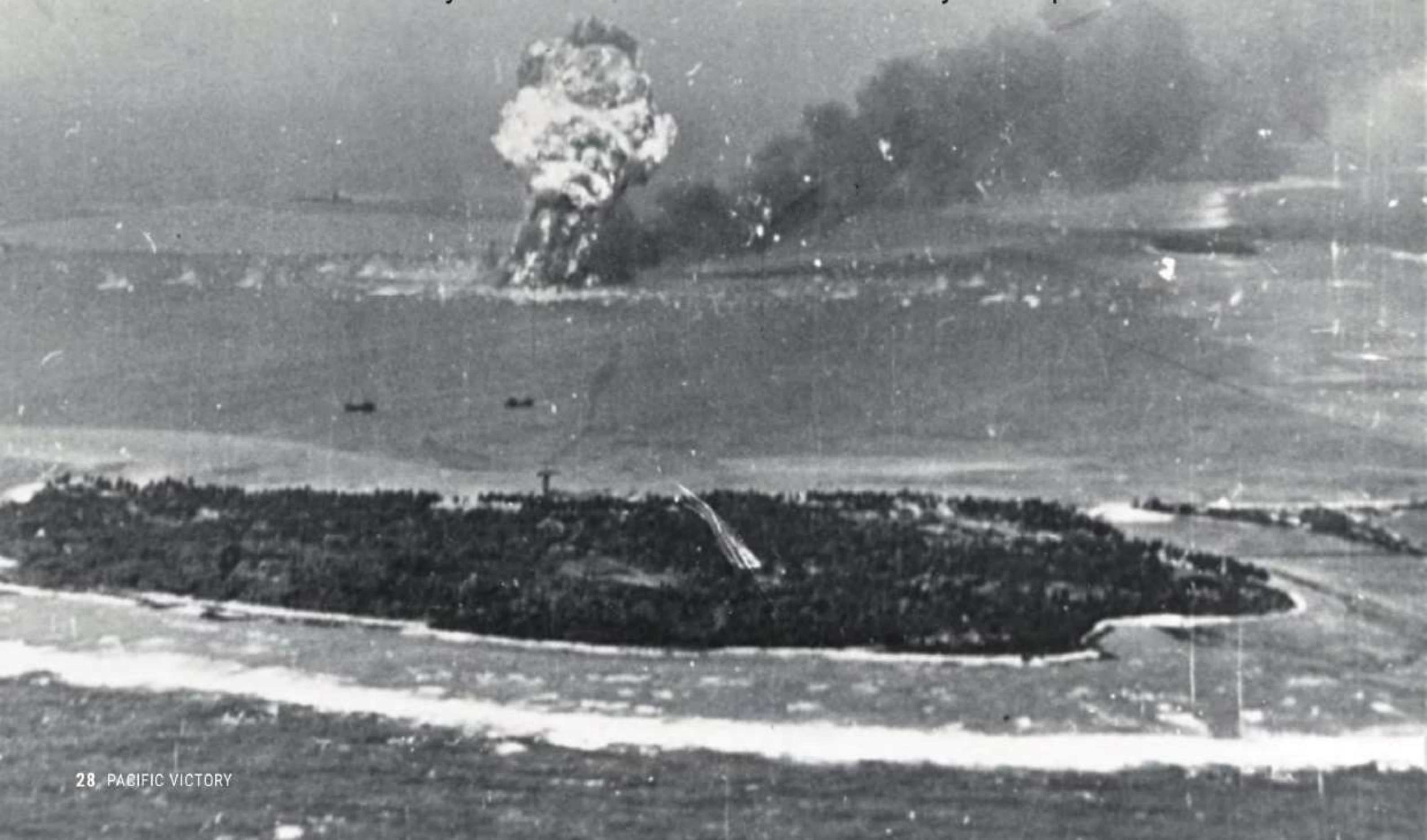
The Marshall Islands had been mandated to Japan after the First World War. Since that time outsiders had been barred and the islands had become a source of mystery and speculation. There was one thing, however, upon which the Allied planners could be certain – they would be defended to the death by the Japanese.

After the capture of Tarawa, and the simultaneous invasion of the most northerly of the Gilbert Islands, Makin Atoll, the next target of the US forces in their push through the central Pacific towards the Marian Islands, was the Marshall Islands chain.

The main concentration of Japanese forces in the Marshalls was on Kwajalein Atoll. This, the largest atoll in the world, consists of a series of eighty reefs and islets surrounding a huge lagoon of 800 square miles. Kwajalein was, therefore, to be the target of the American operation, with a few other tactically important islands occupied, whilst most of the other atolls were to be bypassed.

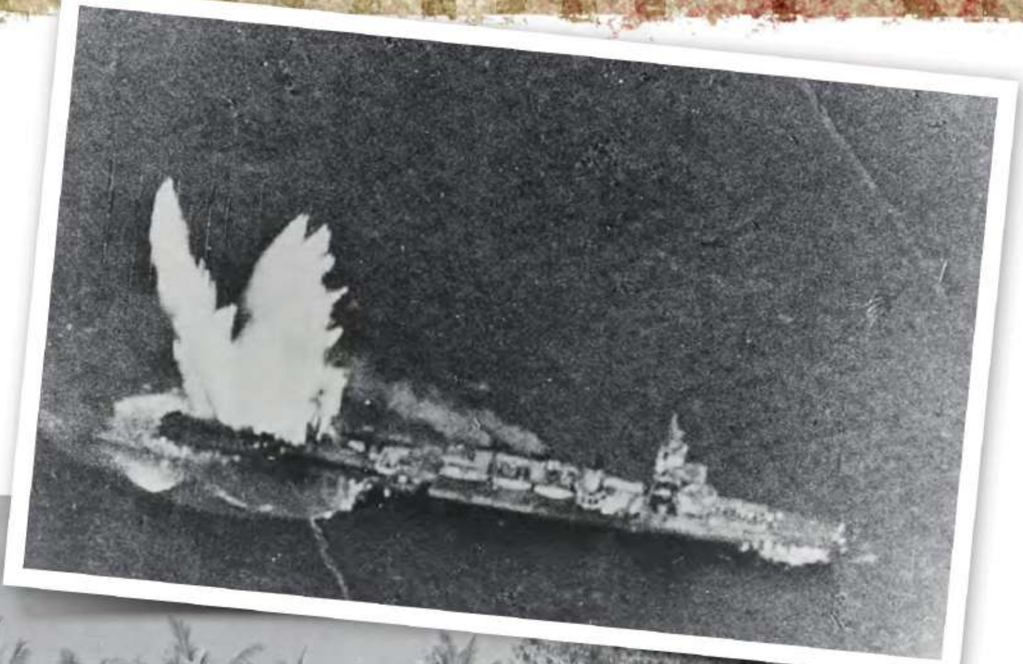
The ground forces for the attack would be drawn from both the US Army and the US Marine Corps. There were two main objectives to be seized at Kwajalein. These were the twin islands of Roi-Namur, with the important airfield at the northern (Roi) extremity of the atoll, which would be attacked by the 4th Marine Division, and Kwajalein Island itself, to be assaulted by the 7th Infantry Division. First, though, was the 'softening-up'.

This began on December 4, 1943, with carrier and shore-based strikes. The Seventh Air Force conducted high altitude raids, while Kwajalein and Roi were hit by carrier aircraft under the command of Rear Admiral Charles A 'Baldy' Pownall. Strikes on Roi airfield by USS *Essex* and USS *Lexington* aircraft destroyed just three Japanese bombers and 16 fighters on the ground, leaving 30 to 40 Japanese aircraft undamaged. However, 18 Japanese fighters and ten bombers were shot down. In the meantime, 41 Douglas SBD Dauntless dive bombers and 36 Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bombers attacked the old Japanese light cruiser *Isuzu* and several other small ships. Two bombs hit the cruiser, jamming her rudder but not sinking her. Several torpedoes hit the Japanese transport *Asakaze Maru*, which blew up in a spectacular explosion.



MAIN PICTURE: **The Japanese transport *Asakaze Maru* blows up in the lagoon at Kwajalein Atoll after being attacked by a US Navy carrier strike. Namur Island is in the foreground.** (USNHHC)

At the same time, aircraft from *Enterprise* and *Yorktown* attacked Kwajalein, where three Japanese supply ships were sunk, and the light cruiser *Nagara* was damaged. At the seaplane base at Ebeye Island, 18 float-planes were destroyed. All told, the raids on Roi and Kwajalein cost the Japanese about 55 aircraft, whereas the US lost just five. These strikes were the prelude to a month of shore-based pounding throughout the Marshalls by Consolidated B-24 Liberators operating from Nanumea Island in the Ellice Islands.



ABOVE: This is believed to be the Japanese light cruiser *Isuzu* after the US Navy carrier air attacks on shipping at Kwajalein Atoll, December 4, 1944. However, the track leading directly to the explosion area, and visible at the bottom of the image, strongly indicates that a Mark XIII torpedo was actually responsible for the damage, and not the bombs that were also dropped. (USNHHC)

ABOVE LEFT: Armourers loading ammunition on to a B-24 Liberator of the 27th Bombardment Squadron, 30th Bombardment Group, at the airfield on Nanumea Island in the Ellice Islands. This bomber, #42-72968 which was nicknamed *Ginny Lynn*, is being prepared for a mission to the Marshall Islands in December 1943. (NARA)

OPERATION FLINTLOCK

Before looking at the operation to take the Marshall Islands from the Japanese, codenamed Operation *Flintlock*, an appraisal of the astonishing military might the Americans were now able to deploy in the Pacific should be stated. A navy that possessed just over 1,000 ships of all types and sizes in 1940 had quadrupled in number during the intervening years. It could now boast 70 new aircraft carriers, 35,000 aircraft, and hundreds of landing craft.[1]

The speed at which American industry had been converted to the production of military hardware was matched by the speed at which tactics on the battlefield had evolved. Though only weeks after the disappointing performance of the LVTs at Tarawa, they had been supplemented by armoured amphibious tractors fitted with 37mm cannon which, in the assault upon Roi-Namur, would follow behind rocket-firing gun boats. Then, to support and reinforce the troops on the landing beaches, amphibious trucks, the famous six-wheel-drive DUKWs (colloquially known as Ducks), were to be employed.

The first island to be invaded was Majuro, the city of that name being the capital of the Marshall Islands. It was found to be undefended and was captured without loss on January 31, 1944.

For the attack upon Roi-Namur, the islands of Mellu, Ennuebing, Ennugarret and Obella, were occupied by the 25th Marines, who landed their 75mm and 105mm artillery the night before the assault. That assault, by the 23rd and 24th Marines, took place on February 1, 1944. It was preceded by an artillery bombardment from the artillery based on those islands which »

LEFT: US Marines battle their way ashore under fire near the pier on Namur Island during the landings on February 1, 1944. They are disembarking from an LVT amphibious tractor. (USNHHC)

RIGHT: One of the enemy bunkers captured on Roi-Namur, showing the extent of the damage it sustained during the pre-landing bombardment. (USNHHC)

BELOW: Marines approach the entrance to a Japanese dugout while clearing out snipers on Roi Island on February 1, 1944. Note the Japanese signpost by the doorway. (USNHHC)

BOTTOM: Marines blasting Japanese snipers from the drainage ditches on Roi Island where they frequently hid, February 1, 1944. (NARA)

poured 6,000 shells onto Roi-Namur, leaving the defenders so stunned that they could only offer sporadic resistance and, at first, they were overwhelmed.

However, the Japanese quickly regained their composure and were determined to resist to the last in a number of strongpoints which had not been destroyed by the naval bombardment. An after-action report of the 2nd Battalion described how these were typically dealt with: "[There] was a blockhouse constructed of reinforced concrete approximately three feet thick. It had three gunports, one each facing north, east, and west… Two heavy hits had been made on the blockhouse, one apparently by 14-inch or 16-inch shells and the other by an aerial bomb. Nevertheless, the position had not been demolished…

"[The battalion commander] then ordered Company G to take the blockhouse. The company commander first sent forward a 75mm halftrack, which fired five rounds against the steel door. At this point a demolition squad came up, and its commander volunteered to knock out the position with explosives. While the halftrack continued to fire, infantry platoons moved up on each flank of the installation. The demolition squad placed charges at the ports and pushed bangalore torpedoes through a shell hole in the roof… 'Cease fire' was then ordered, and after hand-grenades were thrown inside the door, half a squad of infantry went into investigate… Inside were three heavy machine guns, a quantity of ammunition, and the bodies of three Japanese."[2]

In the course of the landings, numerous Japanese soldiers had to be flushed out of, or blown up in, the drainage ditches and culverts surrounding Roi's airfield. Finally, by 18.00 hours on the 1st, the island had been secured. Namur was taken the following day.

"THE GOING WAS TOUGH"

At the same time the Marines were battling their way across Roi-Namur, the Army undertook its assault upon Kwajalein Island. Kwajalein had also received a preliminary battering from the US Navy on January 31, with a large force of warships and aircraft pouring high explosive onto the narrow island which is roughly two-and-a-half miles long and just 800 yards wide. Artillery support also came from nearby islands in the same way as the attack on Roi-Namur, with the 145th Field Artillery Battalion firing an impressive 28,000 rounds onto the Japanese positions, all of which added to the 7,000 fired by the Navy.

Then, on February 1, the riflemen of the 32d and 184th Infantry Regiments were carried smoothly and efficiently ashore on a flotilla of LVTs. Once on land, the assault units found widespread devastation from the bombing and shelling. Smashed seawalls, uprooted trees, demolished buildings, scarred pillboxes were everywhere, but, as was becoming the norm in the Pacific, dug in amidst all this debris were the Japanese.

They had buried themselves in what were termed "spider holes", from where they could pick off the exposed Americans. "The holes were everywhere," recalled Lieutenant Colonel S L A Marshall. "Each one had to be searched from close up. Every

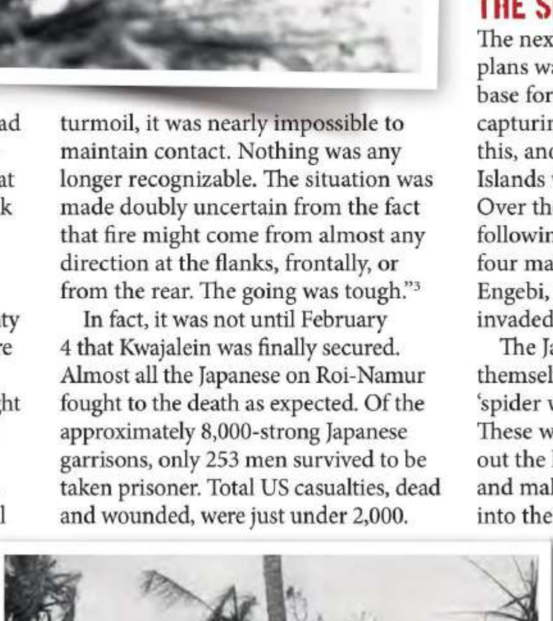
"Inside were three heavy machine guns, a quantity of ammunition, and the bodies of three Japanese."

spot where a man might be hiding had to be stabbed out. So greatly was the beach littered with broken foliage that it was like looking through a haystack for a few poisoned needles.

"Resistance during the day was continually stiffer as the enemy took advantage of every possible uncertainty of the terrain and concentrated the fire of such mortars and artillery as were left to them. Despite the havoc wrought by the bombardments, there was still much cover available and positions were concealed with great adroitness. Many of the concrete installations still stood in partial ruin even though they had received direct hits from heavy naval guns, and the fire from 75mm [guns] had little effect on them."

Work to clear out the enemy was a time-consuming and risky business. "It was necessary to employ heavy demolition charges to breach emplacements sufficiently for the employment of flamethrowers and grenades," continued Marshall. "In the utter turmoil, it was nearly impossible to maintain contact. Nothing was any longer recognizable. The situation was made doubly uncertain from the fact that fire might come from almost any direction at the flanks, frontally, or from the rear. The going was tough."[3]

In fact, it was not until February 4 that Kwajalein was finally secured. Almost all the Japanese on Roi-Namur fought to the death as expected. Of the approximately 8,000-strong Japanese garrisons, only 253 men survived to be taken prisoner. Total US casualties, dead and wounded, were just under 2,000.



THE SPIDERS WEBS

The next step in Admiral Nimitz's plans was to establish an air and sea base for the ultimate objective of capturing the Mariana Islands. For this, another atoll in the Marshall Islands was to be seized – Eniwetok. Over the course of three weeks following the taking of Kwajalein, the four main islands of the atoll, Ebeye, Engebi, Parry and Eniwetok itself, were invaded.

The Japanese defenders had dug themselves in well, but this time into 'spider webs' rather than spider holes. These were constructed by knocking out the heads of empty gasoline drums and making a pipeline of them, sunk into the ground and covered with earth and palm fronds. The tunnels branched off in several directions from a central pit, allowing the Japanese soldiers to fire at the advancing Marines from one place and then scurry through the tunnels to emerge and shoot at the Americans from an entirely different spot.

Learning fast, the Marines soon hit upon a method of destroying these underground systems. When the pit at the centre of the web had been located, a smoke grenade would be dropped inside, releasing a cloud of vapor which rolled through the tunnels and escaped from the spider holes. Once the outline of the web was known, the main pit and all its satellite positions could be shattered with demolitions.

Once again, the Japanese on the islands, numbering approximately 3,500, were virtually wiped out.

ABOVE LEFT: **Marines of the 4th Division during the fighting on Namur Island on February 1, 1944. Having thrown a number of hand grenades, these men are preparing to rush a Japanese blockhouse.** (USNHHC)

ABOVE RIGHT: **Taken from an aircraft operating from USS *Corregidor*, this is a view of the southern end of Kwajalein Atoll under bombardment as landing craft approach its western end during the landings on February 1, 1944.** (USNHHC)

LEFT: **Soldiers of the US 7th Infantry Division attack a Japanese blockhouse on Kwajalein.** (US Department of Defense)

BELOW LEFT: **The Stars and Stripes flies over a captured Japanese building on Roi Island at the end of the Battle of Kwajalein. The wrecked building that can just be seen in the background on the left may well be the remains of one of the hangars on the airfield.** (NARA)

NOTES:

1. John Wukovits, *Admiral "Bull" Halsey, The Life and Wars of the Navy's Most Controversial Commander* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010), p.169.
2. Captain John C Chapin, *Breaking the Outer Ring: Marine Landings in the Marshall Islands*, from the Marines in World War II Commemorative Series.
3. ibid.

THE DECISIVE BATTLE

The fighting in the Pacific had been brutal and unforgiving, but in taking the heavily defended island of Saipan, after which came Guam and Tinian, the US troops experienced an entirely new level of horror.

The capture of the Gilbert and Marshall Islands had seen the US isolating and destroying the Japanese occupying forces. But such victories did little to change the strategic situation in the Pacific, and Tokyo and the main Japanese island of Honshu were still far beyond the reach of US bombers on any of the recently-captured territories. There was no likelihood of an end to the war until the Japanese homeland and its people were directly threatened and, after the tenacious resistance shown at Peleliu, the prospect of having to fight all the way to Tokyo was an unwelcome one. But coming off the production lines at Boeing was the new B-29 Superfortress which had an operational range of 3,500 miles. Lying just 1,500 miles from Tokyo were the enemy-held Mariana Islands, and it was to the largest of these islands – Saipan, Guam and Tinian – that the Joint Chiefs turned their attention in the spring of 1944.

Admiral Ernest King had long argued that the Marianas were the strategic key to the western Pacific. Land-based fighter and bomber aircraft on these islands controlled the sea lanes to Japan and protected the home islands. Their capture would sever Japan's communications with the rest of its shrinking empire. But not everyone agreed with him, especially MacArthur who demanded that all effort should be focussed on re-conquering the Philippines and the move against the central Pacific islands should be dropped.

With opinion divided, and to keep MacArthur quiet, the Joint Chiefs decided to support both thrusts, and began planning for the invasion of the most heavily defended island of the Marianas, Saipan. This island had been occupied by the Japanese since 1914 and had a large Japanese civilian population. It, and neighbouring Tinian, had been closed to the world from 1933, and little was known

MAIN PICTURE: US Marine Corps LVTs head for the shore as part of the first wave of the US landings on Saipan, June 15, 1944. (USNHHC)

either of its defences or its defenders. But as the islands had been Japanese for a generation, they were rightly considered legitimate Japanese territory as had indeed been agreed by the League of Nations. For the first time, the Americans would be fighting on Japanese soil.

OPERATION FORAGER

With so little knowledge of Saipan, detailed reconnaissance was essential, but this had to be undertaken with great care. If the Japanese realised that the Marianas were the next US target, they might attempt to reinforce the garrison as well as concentrate their fleet in a bid to reverse the results of Midway and Coral Sea. American carrier aircraft undertook photographic reconnaissance flights only once in February, April and May, though the submarine USS *Greenling* managed to obtain good photographs of the proposed landing beaches in April.

After a prolonged preliminary bombardment by the battleships of Task Force 51, the plan for the assault upon Saipan, part of Operation *Forager*, was for the 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions to land on the south-west coast. Four beaches, designated 'Red', 'Green', 'Blue' and 'Yellow', were wide enough for the four assault regiments from the two divisions to land simultaneously. The other division of the Joint Expeditionary Force, the US Army's 27th Division, was to be held in reserve to be deployed as circumstances dictated. Altogether, the US troops available numbered in excess of 70,000. ≫

LEFT: **A Douglas SBD Dauntless from USS *Lexington* flies over Tanapag Harbour, Saipan, during the landings on June 15, 1944.** (USNHHC)

BELOW: **The battleship USS *New Mexico* firing in support of the landings on Saipan. Another battlesup, USS *Pennsylvania*, can be seen in the background. Note that the middle gun in *New Mexico's* No.3 turret is in the recoil position.** (USNHHC)

A marine throws a hand grenade at an enemy position on Saipan. A second marine is about to throw his grenade, the fuze on which is already burning. (USNHHC)

Despite the enormously-increased strength of the Pacific Fleet, Koga wanted to bring about a great battle which would see the US carrier fleet destroyed once and for all. Knowing that the US fleet would sail in support of the Task Force, Koga saw his chance. It was called Operation *A-GO*. It would be a disaster for the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Meanwhile, one of the largest armadas ever assembled in any theatre of war – more than 600 vessels – sailed from Hawaii. Then, on June 11, a terrifying barrage opened upon Saipan, Guam and Tinian, firstly by aircraft from the Fast Carrier Task Force, then, on the 13th, the big guns of sixteen battleships, including the survivors of Pearl Harbor, *Maryland, Colorado, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, California, New Mexico, Mississippi* and *Idaho*. Throughout that day and the next, the US Navy pounded Saipan, but failed to knock out all the Japanese artillery, much of which had been well concealed until the marines and the infantry splashed through the surf onto the beaches – and that was at 08.40 hours on Wednesday, June 15, 1944.

It was estimated that the enemy garrison amounted to no more than 17,000 men, of whom only 9,000 to 11,000 were combat troops. In reality, the Japanese defenders of Saipan numbered almost 30,000, most of whom had been rushed to the island when it became apparent that the Marianas were likely to be one of the next US targets. This meant, despite feverish activity, that the island was not as well prepared for defence as the Japanese commander, Lieutenant General Yoshitsugu Saitō, might have wished. Admiral Mineichi Koga, who had succeeded Yamamoto as Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet, however, was untroubled by the lack of preparations on Saipan, as he had far greater schemes in mind.

RIGHT: A Japanese pillbox on the edge of what was Blue Beach on Saipan, and which was attacked by the 4th Marine Division's 23rd Regiment during the landings on June 15, 1944. (John Grehan Collection)

"All around us was the chaotic debris of bitter combat."

BELOW: Marines of the first wave ashore on Saipan hug the beach and prepare to move inland on D-Day, June 15, 1944. An LVT, hit by Japanese fire, can be seen burning in the background. (NARA)

ABOVE LEFT: One of the most iconic images of the Battle of Saipan, showing US troops stumble having been hit by Japanese fire during the landings, is held up by an islander at the same spot, to the south of Garapan, during a recent visit. (John Grehan Collection)

ABOVE RIGHT: US Marines, advancing in rugged terrain, clearing caves of the enemy on Saipan, June 1944. (NARA)

D-DAY AT SAIPAN

After negotiating the reef of Saipan Lagoon, the first vessels to slam to a halt on the beaches were tank landing ships which disgorged their cargoes of armoured LVTs mounting 75mm guns. Behind these were gunboats and more tracked landing vehicles packed with troops.

LEFT: Pictured on the flight deck of USS *Lexington*, Lieutenant Junior Grade Alexander Vraciu USNR holds up six fingers to signify his 'kills' during the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot" on June 19, 1944. (USNHHC)

A strong current pushed the boats carrying the 2nd Marine Division too far to the north, leaving a gap of some 400 yards between it and the 4th Division. This only added to the confusion generated by the hail of bullets from small arms and machine-guns, and bombs and shells from mortars and well-sited artillery the Navy had been unable to silence.

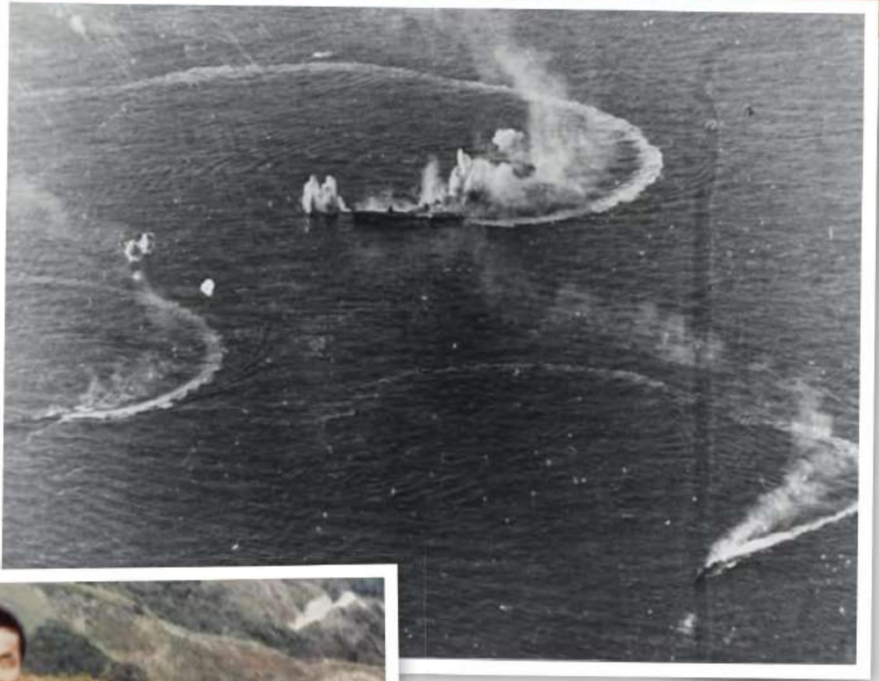
So heavy was the fire of the defenders, the two divisions were unable to bridge the gap and make contact as they slowly battled their way inland. At the same time, trees, trenches, and shell holes stopped some of the tanks of the 2nd Armoured Amphibian Battalion before they could even cross the beach. "All around us was the chaotic debris of bitter combat," recalled First Lieutenant John C Chapin of the 3rd Battalion, 24th Marines. "Jap and Marine bodies lying in mangled and grotesque positions; blasted and burnt-out pillboxes; the burning wrecks of LVTs that had been knocked out by Jap high velocity fire; the acrid smell of high explosives; the shattered trees; and the churned-up sand littered with discarded equipment."[1]

After more than two hours fighting, the Marines had only advanced a few hundred yards inland – much of that distance on their bellies. "It's hard to dig a hole when you're lying on your stomach digging with your chin, your elbows, your knees, and your toes," mused one Marine "[Yet] it is possible."[2] But, from 13.00 hours, the first of the 2nd Division's tanks had landed on Green Beach and moved northward to support the 6th Marines. By mid-afternoon those tanks assigned to the 8th Marines had successfully landed and were also in operation. The tide of battle was beginning to turn.

INTO THE MOUNTAINS

By nightfall, the troops had established a beachhead approximately 10,000 yards in length and over 1,000 yards in depth in most places. Two divisions were ashore with almost all their reserves, as »

LEFT: An information panel explains the fighting on Yellow Beach, the most southerly of the landing beaches on Saipan in 1944. (John Grehan Collection)



RIGHT: As the Battle of the Philippine Sea unfolds, the Japanese aircraft carrier *Zuikaku*, in the centre surrounded by bomb bursts, and two destroyers are pictured here manoeuvring while under attack by US Navy carrier aircraft during the late afternoon of June 20, 1944. *Zuikaku* was hit by several bombs during these attacks, but survived. (USNHHC)

RIGHT: Japanese prisoners are brought in from their isolated positions on Saipan during mopping up operations, July 4, 1944. (NARA)

were most of the two tank battalions. It was, though, six days before the beachhead was fully secured, with the Japanese displaying their usual tenacity. The next stage for Lieutenant General Holland M Smith's men was to drive into the hills in the centre of Saipan where, painful experience had already shown, it could be certain that the enemy would withdraw to make its last stand.

The attack upon Mount Tipo Pale and Mount Tapotchau began on June 22, with, again, the marines leading the way and the 27th Infantry Division in support, backed by eighteen artillery battalions. As expected, the advance was slow as the marines, and later in the day the infantry, fought their way up steep ridges and down deep gullies, blasting the Japanese out of the caves that riddled the cliffs around Magicienne Bay.

On Mount Topotchau the marines of the 4th Division were delayed in their advance because the infantry had failed to keep up, having encountered very stiff resistance and very rough terrain. Holland Smith saw this as being due to a lack of resolve on the part of the 27th Division's commander, Major General Ralph Smith, and he relieved him of his command. The following day, June 25, the marines seized Mount Topotchau, the highest point on the island. The 4th Marine Division also drove deeper into the Japanese positions on the Kagman Peninsula, and it was evident that all resistance there would soon be eliminated.

THE GREAT MARIANAS TURKEY SHOOT

While the fighting raged on Saipan, the largest carrier-to-carrier battle in history was being fought in the Philippine Sea. Aircraft from seven carriers of the US Fifth Fleet and five of the Japanese Mobile Fleet met shortly after 10.00 hours on June 19. The first wave of 50 Japanese aircraft from Guam was caught by US Hellcats,

BELOW: Seen from USS *Monterey*, the carrier USS ***Bunker Hill*** just narrowly misses being hit by a Japanese bomb during the Battle of the Philippine Sea, June 19, 1944. The Japanese aircraft, its tail shot off, can be seen crashing on the far left. (USNHHC)

> **"The largest carrier-to-carrier battle in history was being fought in the Philippine Sea."**

with 35 of them being destroyed by the superior American aircraft.

LEFT: **A view taken from the beach near Tanapag, on Saipan's north-west coast, of part of the area in which the Banzai charge was made on July 7. The attack was launched from the high ground in the distance, an area that was later termed Harakiri Gulch.** (John Grehan Collection)

The next attack was delivered by almost 70 aircraft from the Japanese carriers, but not one of them got through to the US carriers. The following wave was even greater, consisting of 107 aircraft. Though a few bombers did reach the US carriers, but were unable to inflict more than minor damage, and the penalty the attackers paid was to see all but ten of their machines destroyed. The next Japanese attack was delivered by just 47 aircraft. This time, when the US fighters were encountered, not all the Japanese pilots pressed home their attack and only seven were brought down.

A final attempt was made by the Japanese to hit the US ships, but they failed to locate the carrier group. They divided into two groups to return to Guam and the smaller Marianas island of Rota but were intercepted by Hellcats and all 49 were destroyed. One pilot from the USS *Lexington* was heard to remark that the fighting that day was like "an old-time turkey shoot", and the epithet was thereafter used to describe the Battle of the Philippines Sea.[3]

LEFT:During the mass suicides which took place on Saipan at the end of the American operation there, many individuals, soldiers and civilians alike, threw themselves into the sea at what today is called Banzai Cliff. Note the memorials to the dead on the clifftop on the left. (Courtesy of Jerrye and Roy Klotz)

Whilst its aircraft had failed to locate the Japanese fleet, the US Navy's submarines had had more success. The USS *Albacore*, for example, sank the carrier *Taihō*, whilst a torpedo from the USS *Cavalla* resulted in a catastrophic explosion aboard the carrier *Shōkaku* which blew the ship apart.

The next day, June 20, further patrols were flown from the US carriers in an effort to try and find the enemy fleet, and it was almost 16.00 hours before it was believed that a positive sighting was made. But, after the first wave of aircraft had taken off it was discovered that the Japanese ships were, in reality, sixty miles further away. This meant the enemy was at the absolute limit of the range of the Hellcat fighters and Grumman Avenger torpedo-bombers and that it would be dark before they could return to the carriers. A second attack wave was therefore cancelled. Those that carried on in the first wave, sunk the fleet carrier *Hiyō* and damaged three others. The only negative aspect of this raid was that some of the returning aircraft ran out of fuel and others crashed onto the flight decks as they landed in the dark. Eighty aircraft were lost.

The carrier fleet, Japan's most formidable weapon, had been irrevocably wrecked, with its strike force of approximately 600 aircraft destroyed. Complete control of the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean was finally in Allied hands.

DIE WITH HONOUR

Slowly, day-by-day, one Japanese position after another in the hilly interior of Saipan was taken by the marines and the 27th Division. On June 29, near Garapan, the 2nd Marines were faced with the Japanese well dug-in on what was termed 'Flame Tree Hill', utilizing caves masked by the bright foliage on the slopes. That morning, these positions were pounded by artillery, mortars and machine-gun fire. As hoped, instead of sitting tight within the comparative safety of the dug-outs, the Japanese launched a counter-attack. As they

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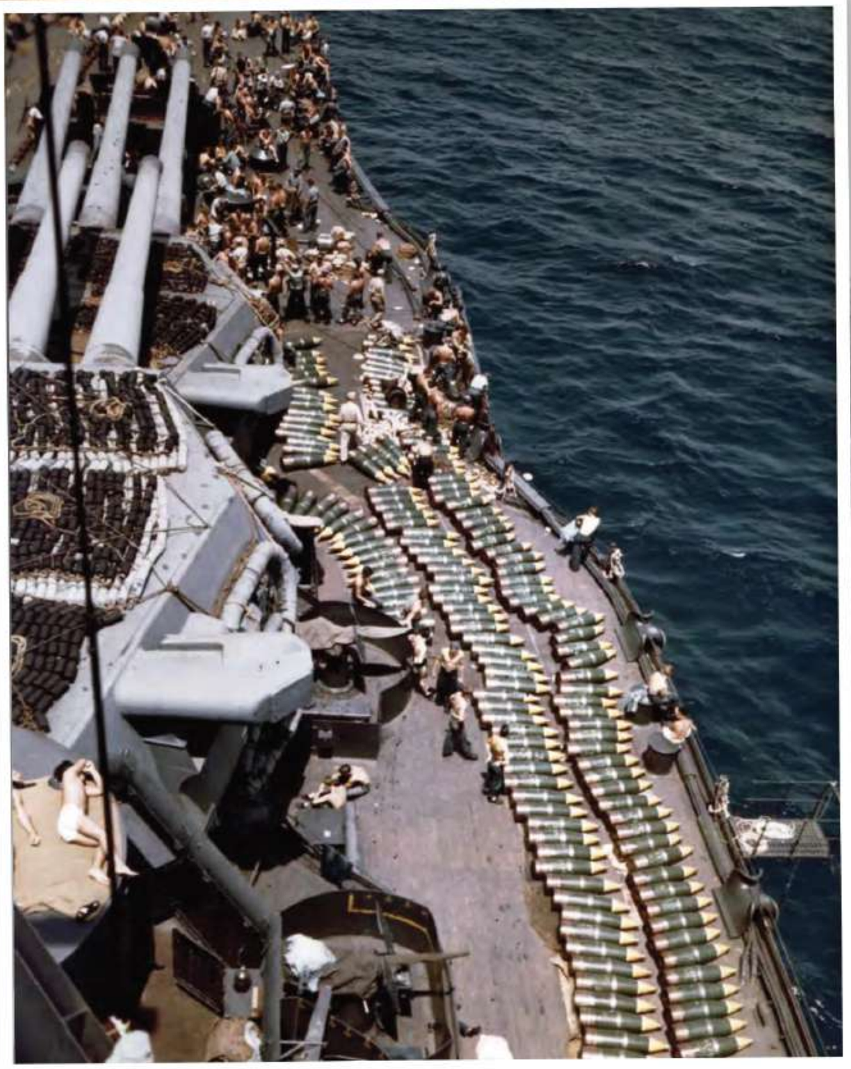
BELOW:
The battered shell of General Saito's and Vice Admiral Nagumo's last command post at Marpi Point at the northern tip of Saipan. (John Grehan Collection)



RIGHT: The battleship USS *New Mexico* is pictured during its preparations for landings on Guam in July 1944. Rows of 14-inch projectiles can be seen on the starboard side of the battleship's deck as the crew replenish her ammunition supply. Note the triple 14/50 gun turrets on the left. (USNHHC)

left cover, the fire from the marines was intensified and the attacking force was wiped out almost to a man.

Though their tactics would evolve over the following months, the Japanese belief in the offensive over studied defence, led to massive and reckless loss of life. As we shall see, a week later this culminated in the largest Banzai charge of the war.

By the end of the first week of July 1944, the defenders had been squeezed into an area of Paradise Valley north of Tanapag. This, the last significant town held by the Japanese, was taken by the 27th Division, elements of which pushed the Japanese back to Marpi Point at the island's northern extremity. There Saito, sick, hungry and wounded, sheltered in a 'miserable' cave with the remnant of his command.

Saito was trapped, and when the Japanese had been in similar situations on Tarawa and the Marshall Islands, they threw themselves at their enemies in one final suicidal assault – and that was just how they were to respond on Saipan. On July 6, Saito issued his orders for a 'banzai' charge to be made the following morning – one in which every man who could move, regardless of his physical state, would attack the Americans with whatever weapons were to hand. The 1st and 2nd battalions of the 105th Regiment were posted in a semi-circle on the Tanapag plain during the night of July 6/7. Behind these units were the 105th's 3rd Battalion, and a short distance further back was positioned the artillery of the 3rd Battalion of the 10th Marines.

At 04.00 hours on July 7, Saito sent his bedraggled band to *Gyokusai* – die with honour. Shortly afterwards he committed suicide, as did Vice Admiral Nagumo.

BELOW: The rusting remains of a US M5A1 Stuart tank of the 4th Marine Division. It was knocked out by Japanese anti-tank fire on June 25. The tank was discovered during excavation work undertaken during the construction of the LaoLao Bay Golf Resort on Saipan. (John Grehan Collection)

BANZAI

At 04.45 hours, just as daylight began to pierce the early morning sky, the sound of bugles echoed across the Tanapag plain. Moments later, a rag-tag army of thousands of Japanese soldiers, sailors, and, according to one witness, civilian construction workers, armed with rifles, spears, or just their bare hands, charged, yelling and screaming as they ran, hobbled or limped towards the American lines. Swarming down the valleys and onto the narrow coastal plain, they found a gap between the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 105th Infantry and ran on towards the regimental headquarters. The Japanese may have been little more than a disorganized rabble, but Major Hoffman USMC later recalled that, "Here was a determination which was seldom – if ever – matched by fighting men of any other country."[4]

"All hell broke loose," remembered Lieutenant George O'Donnell of Company G of the 105th's 2nd Battalion, as the Americans were gradually forced back, in some cases into the streets of Tanapag itself. "From our right and below us, there came thousands of Japs! For two hours they passed by, and came right at us. It was like a mob after a big football game, all trying to get out at once! We had a hard struggle keeping them from overrunning us, and had a field day, firing, firing until our ammunition started to run low. The closest any of them came was ten yards, and we were hitting them at four hundred and five hundred yards also."[5]

The Japanese were slaughtered as they threw themselves at the 105th and the marine artillery, which fired at will over open sights at virtually point-blank range. The bodies of the attackers became piled so high in front of the guns, the marines had to move

round them to retain an open field of fire – and still the Japanese kept coming. The infantry and marines hung on into the afternoon, despite heavy losses, when at last the 106th Regiment came to their help.

Among the relentless Japanese attackers was Mitsuharu Noda, Vice Admiral Nagumo's yeoman who had been relieved of his duties now that his boss was dead. "We were ordered there to be killed," Noda once remarked. "Some probably may have got drunk, just to overcome fear… It was a kind of suicide… We hardly had any arms. Some only had shovels, others had sticks. I had a pistol.

"I think I was shot at the second line of defence. Hit by two bullets in my stomach, one passing through, one lodging in me… I woke up when [Americans] kicked me and they took me to the field hospital."

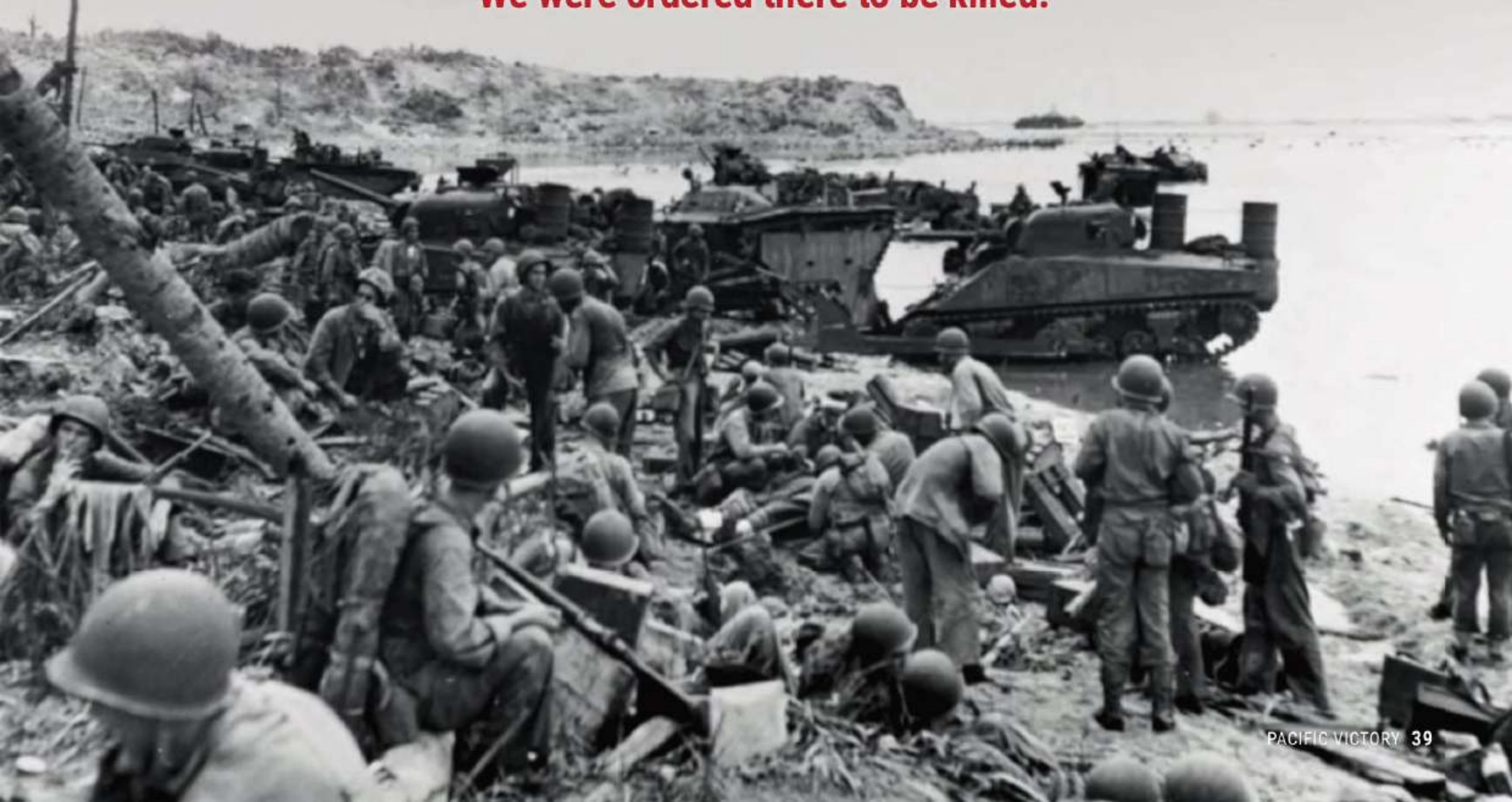
Noda was, unquestionably, one of the lucky ones, for the events that followed the *Gyokusai* were almost too horrible to witness. The plain was strewn with the bodies of the Japanese – 4,311 according to one source[6] – which were ploughed into mass graves by bulldozers. The 105th suffered almost 1,000 casualties. ≫

LEFT: Marines take cover on one of the landing beaches during the initial landings on Guam, July 21, 1944. (NARA)

BELOW: One of three Japanese 14cm coastal defence guns at Piti which overlooked Asan Beach, the landing place on Guam of the US 3rd Marine Division. (John Grehan)

BELOW: The scene on Asan Beach, on the western coast of Guam, as seen an hour-and-a-half after the first landings on July 21. With LVTs and M-4 Sherman tanks beyond, a field dressing station can be seen in operation in the foreground. (NARA)

"We were ordered there to be killed."



RIGHT: A surviving Japanese pillbox that was built into the cliff at Apata Point on the extreme northern edge of Agat Beach on Guam. (John Grehan Collection)

BELOW: A view of Agat Beach on Guam today. This was where the men of the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade and the 305th Regimental Combat Team of the 77th Infantry Division landed in July 1944. (John Grehan Collection)

SUICIDE CLIFF

There were still some Japanese soldiers left alive on the island, as well as many thousands of civilians, possibly as many as 4,000, crammed into the northern tip of Saipan. They were told that the Americans would torture and murder them, and rather than suffer such a terrible and ignoble fate, they preferred suicide.

BELOW: One of the Japanese bunkers that still overlook Agat Beach on Guam. (John Grehan Collection)

Some killed themselves secretly in the caves at Marpi Point, others threw themselves off the cliff, in what one writer called "a final orgy of death". Whole families were seen throwing themselves to their deaths, arms linked. Even little children screamed 'banzai' as they jumped off the 800-foot high cliff.

An article written by Robert Sherrod was published in *Time* magazine which told the citizens of the United States the kind of people the Allies were fighting: "You wouldn't believe it unless you saw it," said one marine. "Yesterday and the day before there were hundreds of Jap civilians – men, women and children – up here on this cliff [Marpi Point]. In the most routine way, they would jump off the cliff, or climbed down and wade into the sea. I saw a father throw his three children off, and then jump down himself. Those coral pockets down there under the cliff are full of Jap suicides."

Another witness, Lieutenant Frederic Stott, saw a, "handful of soldiers, determined to prevent the surrender or escape of their kinfolks, who tossed grenades into the milling throng of men, women, and children, and then dived into the sea… The exploding grenades cut up the mob into patches of dead, dying and wounded, and for the first time we actually saw water that ran red with human blood."[7]

GUAM

The capture of Saipan was only one element of Operation *Forager*. The largest island in the Marianas group is Guam, which, unlike Saipan, had been a US territory before its occupation by the Japanese. It had a garrison of almost 20,000 men with forty tanks, and, once again, its capture would be no easy matter.

The naval and aerial bombardment of Guam had been conducted at the same time as that against Saipan. It was planned that the amphibious assault upon Guam would take place three days after the landing on Saipan, but the unexpectedly prolonged resistance on the latter caused the re-invasion of Guam to be delayed a month. D-Day, therefore, was eventually set for July 21.

Japanese military doctrine for the defence of Guam was essentially the same as that for Saipan. Emphasis was placed on meeting and annihilating the enemy at the beaches. If that failed, an organized counterattack was to be delivered against the beachhead soon after the landing. Finally, if the invaders succeeded in establishing and holding their beachhead line, the Japanese would retire to the hills and fight on from there.

The 3rd Marine Division landed on the western coast near the village of Asan just before 08.30 hours, with advance elements of the 77th Infantry Division (the 305th Regimental Combat Team) landing to the south of the Orote Peninsula at Agat in the afternoon, even though the landing craft could not come closer than the reef, several hundred yards from the beach.

The 77th expected to be ferried ashore from the edge of the reef but this did not happen. "Literally we were just dumped," complained Lieutenant Colonel James Landrum. "We were supposed to transfer to amtracks. They just weren't there.".

Instead, the soldiers had to wade 500 yards through the water to the beach, the whole time exposed to heavy enemy fire. Marine Raymond G Schroeder remembered that day all too vividly: "We lost 75 men in an area the size of a football field, most of them in the first ten minutes… and for every dead man, are always two or three wounded. Our company had the most casualties of any in our battalion… We were at point-blank range, no place to go but straight ahead."[8]

The first night on the beach was a long one, as ammunition ran low and the troops waited anxiously for the Japanese to counter-attack. The enemy taking advantage of the dark, that assault came at 23.30 hours in the form of a wild banzai charge by the 38th Regiment. According to the Marine Corps history, the Japanese came on in full force, yelling, charging with their rifles carried at high port, and throwing grenades. The Marines watched the dark shadows moving across the skyline under light of star shells from the ships. Men lined up hand grenades, watched, waited, and then reacted. The Japanese were all around, attempting to bayonet Marines in their foxholes. They even infiltrated down to pack-howitzer positions in the rear of the front lines. But the Americans held on and Colonel Tsunetaro Suenaga and most of his men were killed.

By the next morning the infantry and marines had established solid beachheads. With the rest of the 77th Infantry landing over the course of the following two days, the US position on Guam was secured.

During the fighting on the beaches, two marines were awarded the Medal of Honor, one of whom was Private First Class Leonard Foster Mason. His citation described his actions on July 22: "Suddenly taken under fire by two enemy machine guns not more than 15 yards away while clearing out hostile positions holding up the advance of his platoon through a narrow gully, Private First Class Mason, alone and entirely on his own initiative, climbed out of the gully and moved parallel to it toward the rear of the enemy position. Although fired upon immediately by hostile riflemen from a higher position and wounded repeatedly in the arm and shoulder, Private First Class Mason grimly pressed forward and had just reached his objective when hit again by a burst of enemy machine-gun fire, causing a critical wound to which he later succumbed. With valiant disregard for his own peril, he persevered, clearing out the hostile position, killing five Japanese, wounding another and then re-joining his platoon to report the results of his action before consenting to be evacuated. His exceptionally heroic act in the face of almost certain death enabled his platoon to accomplish its mission." »

ABOVE: A surviving Japanese 20cm gun at Ga'an Point in the centre of Agat Beach on Guam. (John Grehan Collection)

BELOW: Mindful of the risk of snipers, Marines enter the ruins of Guam's capital, Agana, today Hagåtña, on July 31. (USNHHC)

"We lost 75 men in an area the size of a football field, most of them in the first ten minutes."

ABOVE: Marines demount from an LVT short of the landing beach at Tinian, rocky coral preventing a closer approach, on J-Day, July 24, 1944. (USNHHC)

The 1st Provisional Marine Brigade blocked off the Orote Peninsula, which was held by Lieutenant General Takashina with some 5,000 men. On July 25, Takashina attacked, his men, it seems, fortified by *sake* resulting in senseless actions by officers who attacked the Marine Corps tanks armed only with their *samurai* swords. There were deadly and professional attacks as well, with marines bayoneted in their foxholes. As with the other reckless Japanese charges, it was beaten off.

On the 28th the two beachheads were joined, despite repeated counter-attacks by General Hideyoshi Obata's men which took a terrible toll on the Japanese. There was no longer any point in trying to contain the Americans by the coast and Obata, his men weakened and short of ammunition, resolved to fall back to the mountains in the centre and north of the island. This meant that the island's capital, Agana (today Hagåtña), was freed of Japanese troops. In so doing, the Marines liberated the first American-owned city to fall into enemy hands in 1941.

In the north, the Americans were faced with dense jungle, swarms of mosquitoes, as well as the remaining, and increasingly desperate, Japanese troops. Eventually, Obata's men were trapped on Mount Santa Rosa. The Japanese positions were pounded by the American artillery, following which, on August 8, elements of the 77th infantry stormed the heights. For the cost of 145 casualties, the last Japanese stronghold was taken. The bodies of more than 500 enemy troops littered the hillside.

The surviving Japanese retreated to the cliffs of Pati Point at the northern tip of the island. Aware that the end was upon him and his men, Obata relayed a last message to Tokyo: "Officers and men have been lost, weapons have been destroyed and ammunition expended. We have only our bare hands to fight with. The holding of Guam has become hopeless. Our souls will inhabit the island to the very end. We pray for the serenity of the Emperor."

After a futile last stand on the beach at the foot of the cliff on August 9, organised resistance came to an end. Even so, it was believed that large numbers of enemy troops were at large, and it was not until daybreak that Obata committed suicide at his hideout on Mount Mataguac.

"HELL IS ON US"

The capture of the Marianas, and in particular the Japanese territory of Saipan, was, General Holland Smith declared, "the decisive battle of the Pacific offensive". The assault "opened the way to the [Japanese] home islands", he added. Mirroring his counterpart's thoughts, General Saito had written that "the fate of the Empire will be decided in this one action". One Japanese admiral agreed, noting that, "Our war was lost with the loss of Saipan".

So serious was the situation following the loss of Saipan that it promoted Prime Minister Hideki Tojo to resign, for he could see that from the Marianas, the US bombers would be able to reach Tokyo. "When we lost Saipan," remarked one of Hirohito's aides, "Hell is on us".

Just as significant was the destruction of the Japanese carrier fleet and its

BELOW: Marines wade ashore on a Tinian Beach during the US landings in July 1944. (USNHHC)

> "His exceptionally heroic act in the face of almost certain death enabled his platoon to accomplish its mission."

irreplaceable pilots and planes. There was no Japanese naval force left to oppose the US warships; the Pacific was thereafter controlled by the Allied fleets. This meant that the US, along with the Royal Navy and the navies of Australia and New Zealand, could concentrate their respective strengths against any Japanese territory without the threat of intervention from the Imperial Japanese Navy.

TINIAN'S TURN

The third important island in the Marianas group, Tinian, was to be attacked on July 24, after a prolonged naval and aerial bombardment which began four days earlier utilising 156 guns and howitzers on Saipan. Once again it was the 4th Marine Division which was handed the job of assaulting 'White Beach' on the island's north-west coast.

On landing, the division was to make its main effort toward capturing the high ground of Mount Lasso. The troops were to be carried ashore on 415 LVTs. However, because of the narrowness of the landing beaches, only one company of amphibian tanks could be employed in the assault, namely those of Company D, 2nd Armored Amphibian Tractor Battalion (Marine). The battalion was ordered to precede the first wave of troops, fire on the beaches after naval gunfire was lifted, and move to the flanks before reaching land. A diversionary attack was also to be made against Tinian Town (today's San Jose). The 27th Infantry Division, less the sadly depleted 105th Infantry Regiment and its associated artillery, was to remain in corps reserve and "be prepared to embark in landing craft on 4 hours' notice".

Opposing the attackers were less than 9,000 Japanese under Colonel Takashi Ogata, commanding officer of the 50th Infantry Regiment, which represented the bulk of the Japanese Army forces on the island. As well as regimental and coastal artillery, Ogata also commanded the 18th Infantry Tank Company, which, with its nine tanks, constituted the enemy's entire armoured strength.

Ogata's plan of defence conformed to standard Japanese doctrine at this stage in the war. The enemy was to be destroyed at the water's edge if possible and, if not, was to be harried out of his beachhead by a counterattack on the night following the landing. But if they failed to drive the attackers back into the sea they were to fall back on their prepared positions in the southern part of the island and defend them to the last man.

The Marines landed at daybreak on J-Day, the diversionary attack drawing a furious response from the defenders and which enabled the entire 24th Marines to land on White Beach in just forty minutes. After establishing a solid beachhead, the invaders were subjected to repeated banzai charges which cost the Japanese dearly. Eventually the remnants of Ogata's force retreated to the south of the island, making its last stand in the caves and ravines of a 5,000-yards-long limestone ridge. Colonel Ogata's defence line was drawn on the forward, or north-western, slopes of the heights.

On July 31, the Marines attacked the heights. Ogata led a desperate banzai charge in which he was killed. Further counterattacks were delivered, all of which failed. Rather than surrender, many of the surviving Japanese repeated the scenes at Saipan and threw themselves off the cliff into the waters below.

The island was declared secured on August 1, though disorganised resistance continued for a number of days afterwards. The Japanese also rounded up and killed numbers of civilians, tying them up in groups and them blowing them up with explosives or pushing them over cliffs.

Though victory in the Pacific was now a certainty, what the capture of the Marianas had shown was that the fighting was going to carry on being more brutal than anything anyone had ever imagined.

ABOVE LEFT: **Marine Corps M-4 Sherman tanks and other vehicles deploy inland from the Tinian invasion beaches, July 1944.** (NARA)

ABOVE RIGHT: **A relic of the assault upon Tinian – the hull of an LVT which can still be seen a short distance inland from what was White Beach.** (John Grehan Collection)

BELOW: **The Japanese had a large communications centre on Tinian which was used for inter-island communication. Though badly damaged, it survived the American landings in 1944.** (John Grehan Collection)

NOTES:

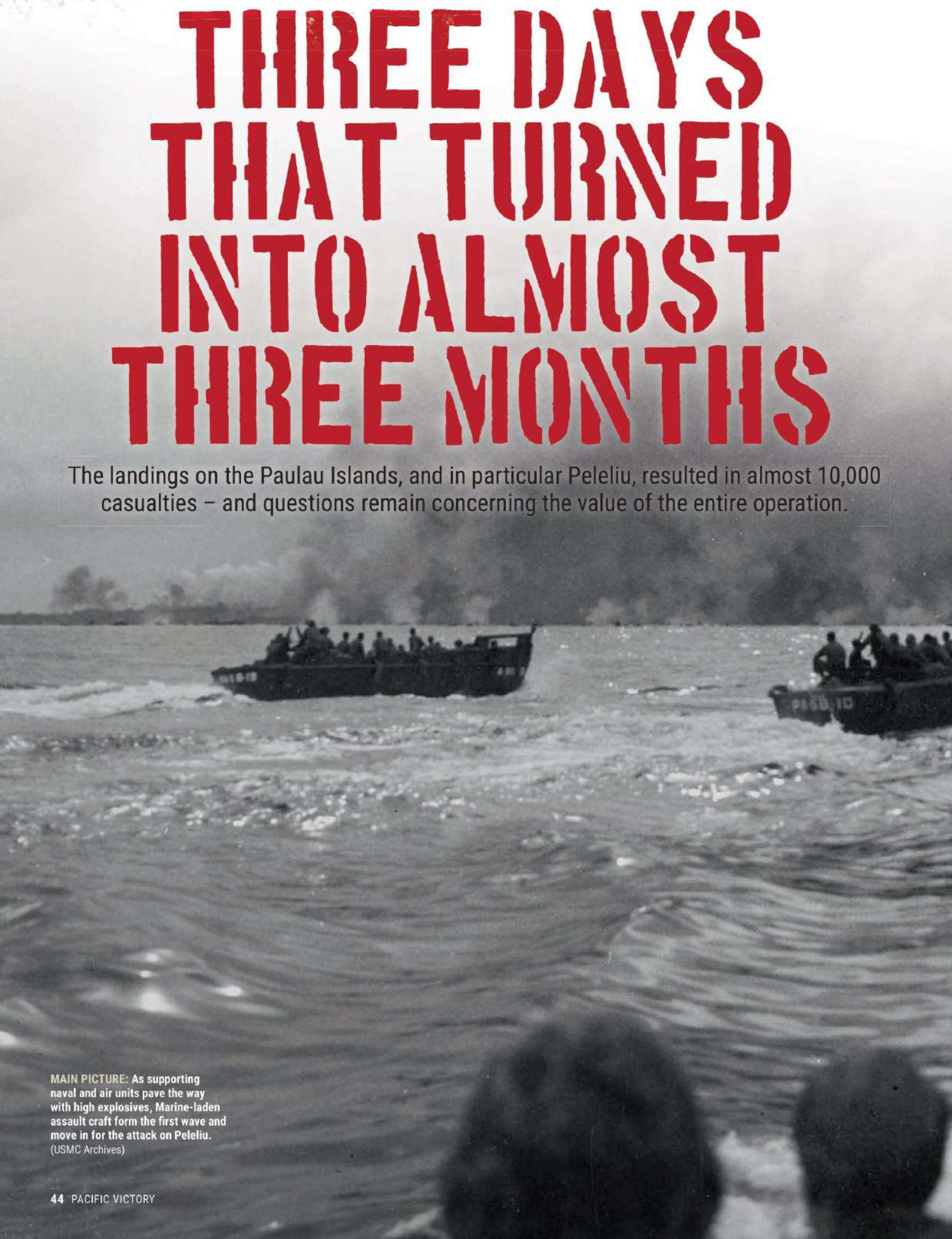
1. Captain John C Chapin, USMCR (Retd.), *Breaching the Marianas: The Battle for Saipan* (Marines in World War II Commemorative Series), p.1.
2. *The Japan Times*, 5 July 2014.
3. Chester G Hearn, *An Illustrated History: The U.S. Navy from 1775 to the 21st Century* (Zenith Press, St Paul, 2007), p.80.
4. Commander David Moore USN (Retd.), *The Battle of Saipan - The Final Curtain*, www.battleofsaipan.com.
5. Victor Brooks, *Hell is Upon Us, D-Day in the Pacific, June-August 1944* (Da Capo Press, Cambridge, 2005), pp.221-2.
6. Derrick Wright, *Pacific Victory, Tarawa to Okinawa 1943-1945* (Sutton, Stroud, 2005), p.90.

7 Harold J Goldberg, *D-Day in the Pacific, The Battle of Saipan* (Indiana University Press, Indianapolis, 2007), p.201.

8. *War In the Pacific: Ga'an Point*, an information sheet issued by the US National Parks Service.

THREE DAYS THAT TURNED INTO ALMOST THREE MONTHS

The landings on the Paulau Islands, and in particular Peleliu, resulted in almost 10,000 casualties – and questions remain concerning the value of the entire operation.



MAIN PICTURE: As supporting naval and air units pave the way with high explosives, Marine-laden assault craft form the first wave and move in for the attack on Peleliu. (USMC Archives)

The Paulau Islands were considered by the Japanese to form part of its second defensive line, occupying a key strategic position in the South Pacific, sitting squarely on the flank of any Allied force approaching the Philippines from the south-east – and after neutralising the Japanese in the Solomons and the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines were General MacArthur's next objective. Yet, the capture of the Marianas had given the US a base from which they could bomb Japan, and from where they could advance directly towards Okinawa and the Japanese home islands. Admiral Nimitz saw no point in wasting resources on attacking the Philippines which could be bypassed without affecting the operations against Japan.

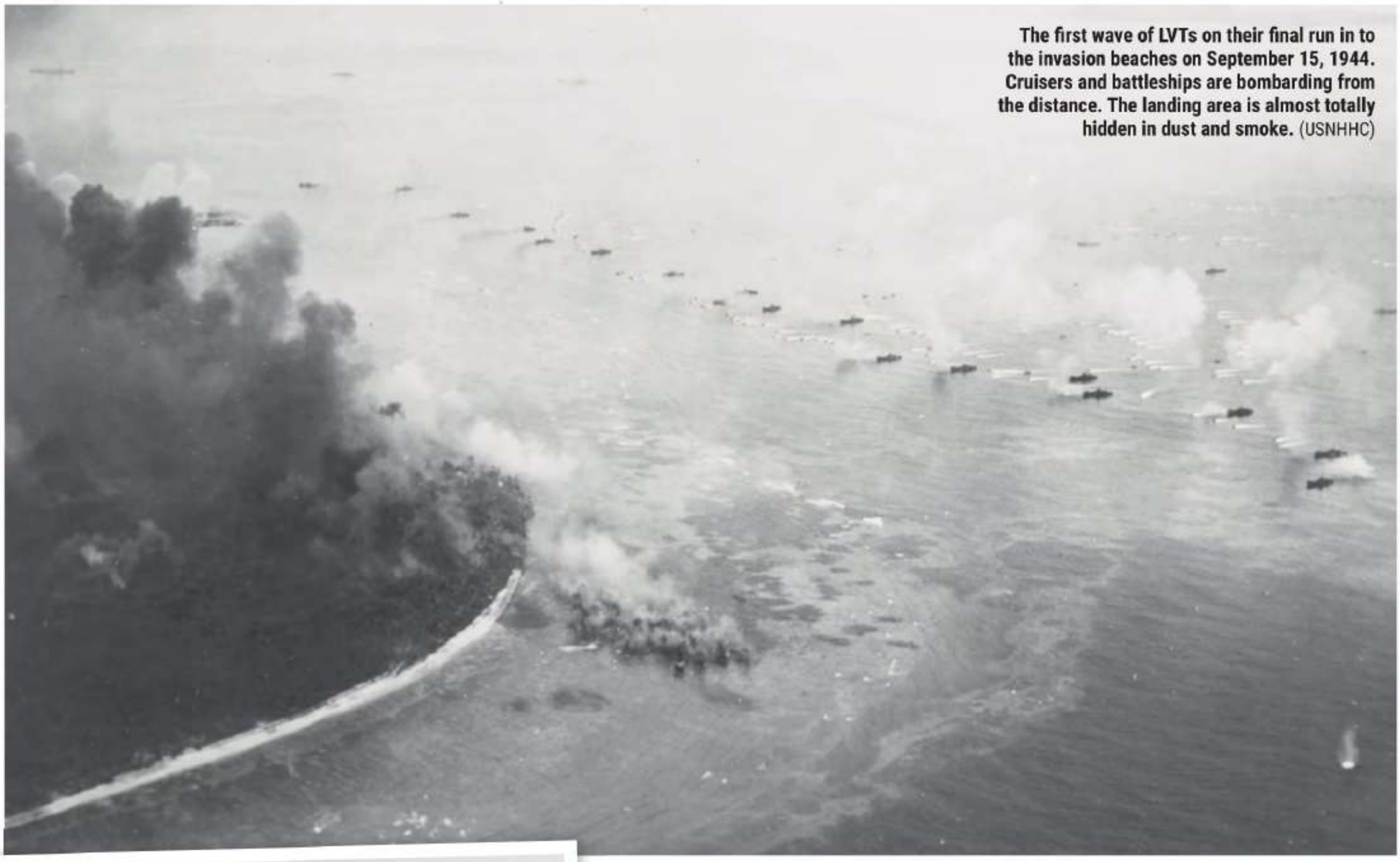
When MacArthur, who was in supreme command in the Philippines, had been ordered to transfer to Australia to avoid capture by the Japanese, he had promised to return and he was determined to fulfil his pledge and liberate the Philippines. The US Chiefs of Staff were torn between the rival policies and President Roosevelt had to personally intervene in the dispute. Due to his defiant stand at Bataan and Corregidor, MacArthur had become a national hero across America and it had even been suggested that he should be the next president. Roosevelt decided to back MacArthur.

Before he could risk an assault upon the Philippines, MacArthur felt that he needed to secure his eastern flank by taking the Paulau Islands. For this operation, codenamed *Stalemate 2*, the Army's 7th and 96th divisions would attack the islands of Yap and Ulithi, while the Army's 81st Division and the 1st Marine Corps would assault Peleliu and Angaur.

There was, though, still the question as to whether the capture of the Paulau Islands was really necessary or not. That question came from Admiral 'Bull' Halsey who, as commander of the US Navy's Western Pacific Task Force, was assigned to conduct supporting operations before the Philippine invasion. MacArthur's plan for the Philippines was firstly to take the most southerly of the major islands, Mindanao, before attacking the main island of Luzon. Halsey's task was to neutralise the Japanese air bases on Mindanao, and on September 9-10, 1944, his aircraft undertook two massive strikes against targets on the island. The US aircraft encountered little opposition, which made Halsey wonder just how strongly the island was defended. He decided that he could chance attacking Luzon, which his aircraft did two days later, shooting down 200 Japanese 'planes and destroying a further 300 on the ground. ≫

ABOVE: A gun crew on the battleship USS *Mississippi* loading their 5/51 gun during the bombardment of Peleliu prior to the landings in September 1944. The gun's breech is visible in the lower right foreground. (USNHHC)

THREE DAYS THAT TURNED INTO ALMOST THREE MONTHS


The first wave of LVTs on their final run in to the invasion beaches on September 15, 1944. Cruisers and battleships are bombarding from the distance. The landing area is almost totally hidden in dust and smoke. (USNHHC)

ABOVE: Marines from the 1st Marine Division head for the beach as their LVTs churn past the offshore line of LCI gunboats, September 15, 1944. Note the gunner saluting from the LVT(2) in the foreground, as well as the Idaho-class battleship bombarding Japanese positions in the left distance. (USNHHC)

RIGHT: Men of the USMC's 1st Division are pictured preparing to advance inland from White Beach. (Historic Military Press)

Halsey believed that MacArthur could ignore Mindanao and launch his attack further north nearer to Luzon and the capital, Manila, saving a great deal of time, and lives. Such a move would also mean that there was no need to attack the Paulau Islands, saving even more time and men. When he sent his despatch to Nimitz recommending these changes of plan, he knew he was taking a great risk. "Here is where my neck is way out," he mused, "and my head will probably be rolling in a basket tomorrow morning".[1]

Nimitz agreed to switch the attack upon the Philippines closer to Luzon, but disagreed with Halsey about the Paulau Islands, saying that the invasion forces were already at sea and it was too late to call off the operation, which was, of course, hardly a valid reason as the ships could have been immediately turned round. This decision was to prove fatal to so many young, brave men.

"WE LL BE THROUGH IN THREE DAYS"

The enemy force on the Paulus Islands that those young men would have to overcome was Lieutenant General Sadae Inoue's 14th Division. The main body of this formation was based on Peleliu with its important airfield, whilst other smaller elements of the division were deployed to the islands of Babelthuap and Angaur.

In command on Peleliu, with more than 10,000 infantry, artillery and seventeen tanks, was Colonel Kunio Nakagawa. There were very few aircraft available to support the defenders, and those that there were would be destroyed in the preliminary bombardment of Peleliu which began on September 12. For two days, the island was pounded relentlessly by Halsey's carrier aircraft and his battleships and cruisers. Barracks and airfield installations were

wrecked, harbours mined, 110 aircraft destroyed and all but two hospital ships sunk. Such was the devastation, the commander of the 1st Marine Division, Major General William H Rupertus, told his men: "We're going to have some casualties, but let me assure you this is going to be a fast one, rough but fast. We'll be through in three days – it may only take two."[2]

Peleliu is about six miles long, shaped roughly like the claw of a lobster, and surrounded by a fringing reef up to 1,000 yards in width. The southern portion, where the airfield lay, is about two miles across at its widest point. Peleliu is generally flat, though there is one area of high ground and steep ridges – the Umurbrogol Mountain – to the north of the airfield. This feature was justifiably considered by the American commanders to be the key piece of terrain on the island.

There were plenty of open beaches on the south-western shore of the island for the landing of the Marines, so the plan was to land the 1st Marine Division's three infantry regimental combat teams abreast. On the left of the attack, the 1st Marines were to drive inland through the barracks area and then wheel left to attack the nose of the high ground in the north.

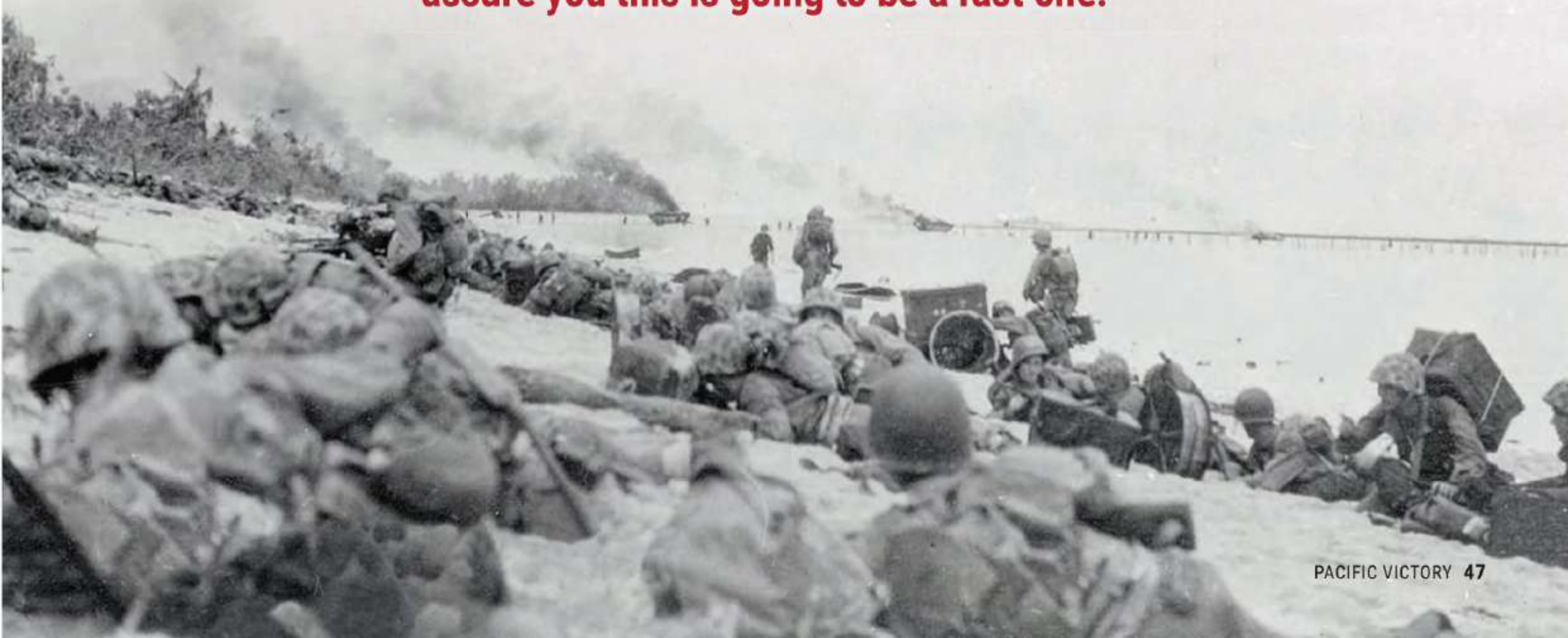
The 5th Marine Division, in the centre, was to push straight across the island to its eastern shore, thus cutting the island in two, while the 7th Marines would also drive across to the eastern shore and then move southwards to 'mop up' the, by then, isolated enemy contingents on the southern tip of the island. The airfield and comparatively open ground »

ABOVE: A DUKW lies smouldering and abandoned on the beach at Peleliu after taking a hit from indirect fire on September 15, 1944. (NARA)

LEFT: As the advance inland from the beachhead continues, US Marines move forward in company with a Sherman tank, September 1944. (USMC Archives)

BELOW: D-Day on Peleliu – US Marines on Orange Beach during the landings on September 15. (USMC Archives)

"We're going to have some casualties, but let me assure you this is going to be a fast one."



ABOVE LEFT: Members of a Marine demolition crew, assigned to blasting forward enemy positions on Peleliu, evacuate one of their comrades who was wounded by a Japanese sniper. (National Museum of the US Navy)

ABOVE RIGHT: Marines in action during the fighting for Peleliu airfield. (Historic Military Press)

BELOW: A US serviceman examines a Japanese Type 95 Ha Go light tank from the 14th Infantry Division. It was destroyed by US Marine anti-tank teams during the Japanese counterattack across the airfield on Peleliu. (NARA)

immediately to the south of it was suitable for tank operations, and it was anticipated that the drive across the island could be completed quickly.

"UTTER CHAOS"

At 08.32 hours on September 15, 1944, the Marines began landing on Peleliu, the men being carried ashore by an assortment of DUKWs, LVTs, and landing craft, which took them to the edge of the reef where they clambered into further LVTs to be ferried over the last stretch to the shore. Based on the experiences of the previous amphibious assaults, it was a good plan.

But, almost immediately, it started to fall apart. The Japanese quickly emerged from their well-prepared bunkers and manned their guns. Very quickly the rate at which the Marines were fed onto the beaches was dramatically reduced.

The LCVP in which Pfc Paul J Shread, of Company B, 1st Marine Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, sped towards the beach came to a halt on the reef. The ramp was lowered, and the men jumped out, only to disappear beneath the surface in the deep water. It was only by shedding all his gear, including his rifle, that he was able to reach the beach some 200 yards distant. "The landing beach was utter chaos," Shread later recalled. "Only one of the three regiments had remained intact and was an effective fighting unit. Weapons had been lost and there was no apparent command. Marines were acting on their own, not as a cohesive unit. Burning landing craft littered the water and beach. The sky was still aglow, made even more spectacular by planes falling in flames. Dead Marines floated face down in the water, bobbing gently, their fatigue uniforms inflated into useless life preservers. Bodies dotted the beach where they died."[3]

It was the 1st Marines who encountered the stiffest resistance. Almost immediately upon landing, the Marines found themselves facing an obstacle not shown on their maps. This was a coral ridge almost 30 feet high, which was dotted with holes in which enemy gun emplacements had been created. The Marines were pinned down by heavy artillery and machine-gun fire from the ridge. Even worse, however, was a rock and coral promontory that, known as The Point, stretched into the sea. It had been turned into a strong fortified post from where the Japanese were able to pour flanking fire down on almost all of 'White 1' and 'White 2' beaches.

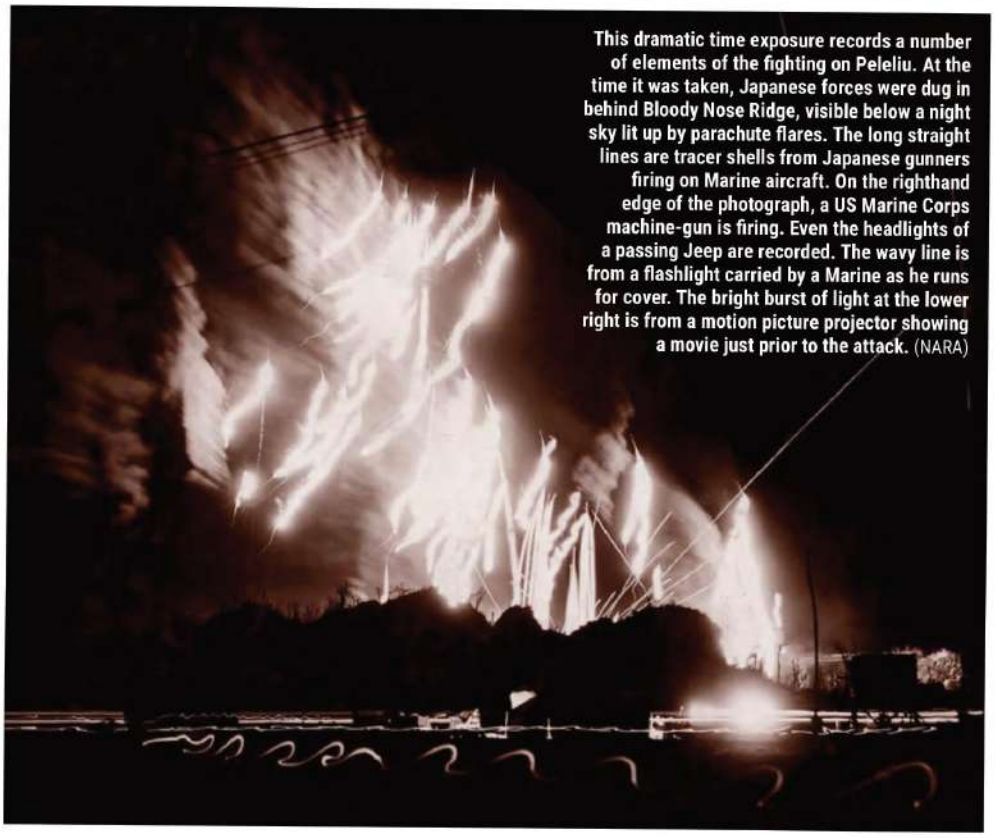
With the 5th Marines, to the left of the 1st, was E B Sledge of Company K, 3rd Battalion: "Up and down the beach and out on the reef, a number of amtracs and DUKWs were burning. Japanese machine-gun bursts made long splashes on the water as though flaying it with some kind of giant whip. The geysers belched up relentlessly where the mortar and artillery shells hit."[4] Nevertheless, with open terrain ahead of it, the 5th Marines fared better than the 1st, but could not

"Burning landing craft littered the water and beach."

advance too far while the 1st were trapped on the beach.

Out on the right flank, the 7th Marines found that the reef in that area was so cluttered with both natural and man-made obstacles that the amtracks were often obliged to pick their way shoreward in columns. This slowed down the whole approach and made the vehicles prime targets for the fire which now poured into them from the machine-guns and artillery on the southwestern promontory.

The tactics employed by the Japanese when attempting to repel amphibious landings so far in the war had put their greatest effort into stopping the invading troops on the beaches, followed by reckless, even suicidal, counter-attack to try and regain lost territory. At Peleliu it would be different. All that Colonel Nakagawa sought to achieve when the Marines landed was to cause as much death and disruption as possible but, once the Americans were established on the beaches, he would pull back to the Umurbrogol Mountain which had been turned into a veritable fortress. It was there that the real battle for possession of Peleliu would be fought.



This dramatic time exposure records a number of elements of the fighting on Peleliu. At the time it was taken, Japanese forces were dug in behind Bloody Nose Ridge, visible below a night sky lit up by parachute flares. The long straight lines are tracer shells from Japanese gunners firing on Marine aircraft. On the righthand edge of the photograph, a US Marine Corps machine-gun is firing. Even the headlights of a passing Jeep are recorded. The wavy line is from a flashlight carried by a Marine as he runs for cover. The bright burst of light at the lower right is from a motion picture projector showing a movie just prior to the attack. (NARA)

LEFT: The view from an LVT during the crossing from Peleliu to Ngesebus. (National Museum of the US Navy)

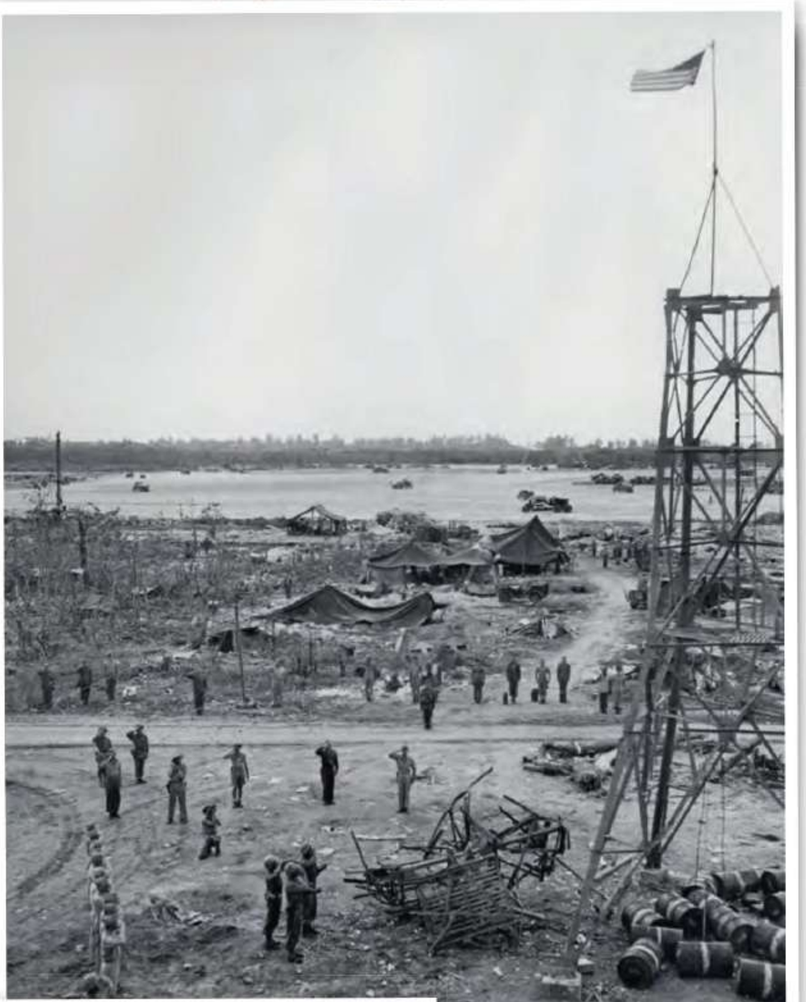
Even so, the resistance the defenders exhibited on that first day was formidable and, in the afternoon, there was an attempt at a counterattack by the Japanese. Supported by all their tanks, some 500 Japanese soldiers charged across the airfield in a bid to drive the Marines back into the sea. But the Japanese had left it too late, as by that time the Americans had brought anti-tank guns ashore and the tanks were quickly picked off, aided by a US Navy Dauntless dive-bomber which dropped its 500lb bomb squarely on the advancing infantry.

The attack, like so many of the Japanese counterattacks, was a disaster. Around 450 men lay dead and all but two tanks had been destroyed. Those two tanks took part in another counterattack which took place just before 17.00 hours at the point where the 1st and 5th Marines met. This was also a failure, resulting in the loss to Nakagawa of the last of his armour. Neither of these attacks were the en masse suicidal charges seen on other islands, but they still cost the Japanese heavily.

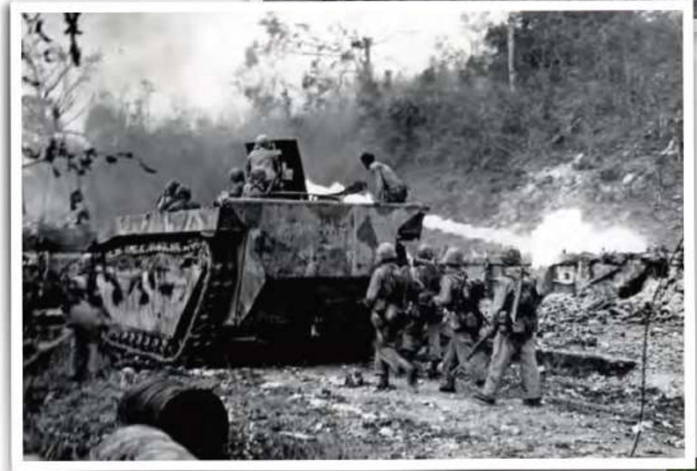
By the end of the day, the Marines had a firm hold on Peleliu. But rather than Japanese resistance crumbling on the following days as expected, it stiffened, as they withdrew to their prepared defensive positions. The men of the 7th Marines were able to clear the south of the island over the course of the following two days, but the woods and the swamps which the 1st and the 5th encountered as they pushed north were infested with enemy emplacements which had to be reduced by costly hand-to-hand fighting. It was not until D+2 that the 1st Marines reached the high ground where the Japanese were waiting. »

BELOW: Pfc Douglas Lightheart, on the right, cradles his .30-calibre machine-gun in his lap, while he and his colleague, Pfc Gerald Churchby grab a moment's rest during the mopping up operations on Peleliu Island. (National Museum of the US Navy)

THREE DAYS THAT TURNED INTO ALMOST THREE MONTHS



RIGHT: **The Stars and Stripes fly over Peleliu, having been raised on a makeshift flagpole atop a crude Japanese observation tower. This was the first formal flag-raising on the island following the landings.** (USMC Archives)



BELOW: **A US Marine Corps LVT-4 flame thrower in action against dug-in Japanese troops on Peleliu.** (NARA)

"NOT MANY MADE THE TOP"

With temperatures exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit, the Marines now faced their most difficult task so far as they set about tackling what they called 'Bloody Nose Ridge'. According to the *Regimental Narrative* of the 1st Marines, these rocky heights were "a contorted mass of decayed coral strewn with rubble, crags, ridges and gulches thrown together in a confusing maze". There were simply dozens of caves and pillboxes worked into the coral from where the Japanese could pour fire down on the Marines clambering up the exposed slopes. The Marines could not dig into the coral to find shelter, whilst the jagged surface slashed their boots and uniforms, and cut their bodies when they flung themselves down to avoid enemy fire. Mortar rounds and shells hit the coral, sending sharp fragments of coral flying in all directions. Even the Sherman tanks that drove up to the ridge were knocked out by well-concealed artillery pieces and were forced to withdraw.

So broken was the terrain, there was no continuous line of attack, with companies, even platoons, advancing in any direction which offered an easier route or where an enemy strongpoint blocked their path and had to be neutralised. "From the base of the cliff, we could pick out each man and follow him until he got hit, went to ground, or climbed the top," wrote Private Russell Davis of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines. "Not many made the top. As they toiled, caves and gulleys and holes opened up and Japanese dashed out to roll grenades down on them, and sometimes to lock, body to body, in desperate wrestling matches. Knives and bayonets flashed on the hillside."[5]

By D+5, the 1st Marines had suffered 1,749 casualties, 70 per cent of its strength, and was withdrawn, being replaced by the 321st Regimental Combat Team of the US Army's 81st Division. The Japanese also received fresh blood in the form of some 300-600 men who had been held on Babelthuap Island in the belief that the Americans would land there. But, by September 22 it was obvious that the battle for the Paulau Islands was being fought on Peleliu and Lieutenant General Inoue ferried the men across to the north of Peleliu by barge.

The following day, D+8, the Amercian encirclement of Umurbrogol Mountain began. This included the taking of a small island to the north of Peleliu, Ngesebus, where there was a fighter airstrip and from where Japanese artillery was able to fire on the troops fighting their way up Umurbrogol.

The island was taken by the 5th Marines, under the cover of a heavy naval bombardment carried across the narrow channel of water by thirty-five Amtracs, ahead of which were thirteen waterproofed Shermans. By the afternoon of the following day, the island was in US hands.

RIGHT: **Partly because of its isolated position, as well as its relatively small population, a number of relics of the fighting on Peleliu in 1944 have survived the passage of time. This is the remains of a Japanese tank, which appears to be a Type 95 Ha-Go.** (Shutterstock)

FAR LEFT: The wreckage of a Japanese Zero that can still be seen in the jungle surrounding what had been the airfield on Peleliu. (Hiromi Ito Ame/ Shutterstock)

NEAR LEFT: A Japanese gun, which is believed to be a 14cm Model 3 coastal defence gun, that is still to be seen where it was emplaced in one of the many caves on Peleliu. (Shutterstock)

LEFT: Mr Kiyokazu Tsuchida (left), a former Japanese Army soldier, and US Navy Rear Admiral Arthur J Johnson, the Commander of the US Naval Region Marianas, meet and embrace during a ceremony commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Battle of Peleliu which was held on the island. Tsuchida, who was stationed on the island in 1944, hid in the island's caves and jungles for nearly two years after the war ended, and did not surrender to American forces until April 1947. (NARA)

On Peleliu, the Japanese were surrounded by the 7th Marines and the 321st RCT in the Umurbrogol 'Pocket', but prizing them from their caves and bunkers was a deadly affair. On October 5, the 7th Marines were withdrawn after losses amounting to 46 per cent of its original strength, the 5th Marines taking over until October 30, when it too was pulled out. The Army now had to finish the job on its own.

Over the days that followed, every assault resulted in a tiny advance being achieved at enormous cost, the troops having to force the Japanese out of their virtually impregnable strongholds. A more considered approach was therefore adopted. Bulldozers cleared routes up the slopes to allow the tanks to climb the mountain and the Japanese positions were 'plastered' by naval aircraft. Nevertheless, it was not until November 24, that Nakagawa, being reduced to just fifty able-bodied men, committed suicide. The remaining Japanese threw themselves at the Americans in a futile last sacrificial act and, finally, on November 27, the Battle of Peleliu came to an end – after two months, one week and five days.

"PELELIU IS A HORRIBLE PLACE"

The capture of Peleliu resulted in the 1st Marine Division suffering in excess of 6,500 casualties, over one third of the entire division, whilst the 81st Division had more than 3,300 men killed or wounded. Robert Martin, a war correspondent with *Time* magazine, was there to experience it all: "Peleliu is a horrible place. The heat is stifling and rain falls intermittently – the muggy rain that brings no relief, only greater misery. The coral rocks soak up the heat during the day and it is only slightly cooler at night. Marines are in the finest possible physical condition, but they wilted on Peleliu. By the fourth day there were as many casualties from heat prostration as from wounds.

"Peleliu is incomparably worse than Guam in its bloodiness, terror, climate and the incomprehensible tenacity of the Japs. For sheer brutality and fatigue, I think it surpasses anything yet seen in the Pacific, certainly from the standpoint of numbers of troops involved and the time taken to make the island secure."

Yet all of this was so unnecessary. Firstly, there was absolutely no possible way that the Japanese in the Paulau Islands could interfere with MacArthur's invasion of the Philippines, as Halsey's bombardment had sunk every ship and destroyed every aircraft. Nakagawa's men could just have been left in impotent isolation.

Secondly, the Paulaus had no value as a staging post for the attack upon the Philippines as, apart from Halsey's operations against Luzon, the Battle of the Philippines Sea had virtually eliminated the Japanese naval and air presence in the region, and MacArthur could mount his attack directly upon the Philippines.

Why, therefore, Admiral Nimitz persisted with the attack on Peleliu has never been satisfactorily explained.

LEFT: The rusting hulk of another armoured vehicle, in this case an LVT, that has remained on Peleliu since the fighting in 1944. (Shutterstock)

NOTES:

1. John Wukovits, *Admiral "Bull" Halsey, The Life and Wars of the Navy's Most Controversial Commander* (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010), p.175.
2. Quoted in Derrick Wright, *Pacific Victory, Tarawa to Okinawa 1943-1945* (Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 2005), p.109.
3. Paul J Shread, "My Turn: The Battle of Peleliu and the Scars of War", *Concorde Monitor*, September 14, 2014.
4. Harry A Gailey, *Peleliu 1944* (Nautical and Aviation Publishing, 1983), p.69.
5. ibid, pp.129-30.

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MACARTHUR'S RETURN

On being ordered to evacuate from the Philippines in 1942, General MacArthur famously declared he would return and liberate the country. By 1944, as the forces under his command pushed ever closer to the Philippines, he intended to keep his promise.

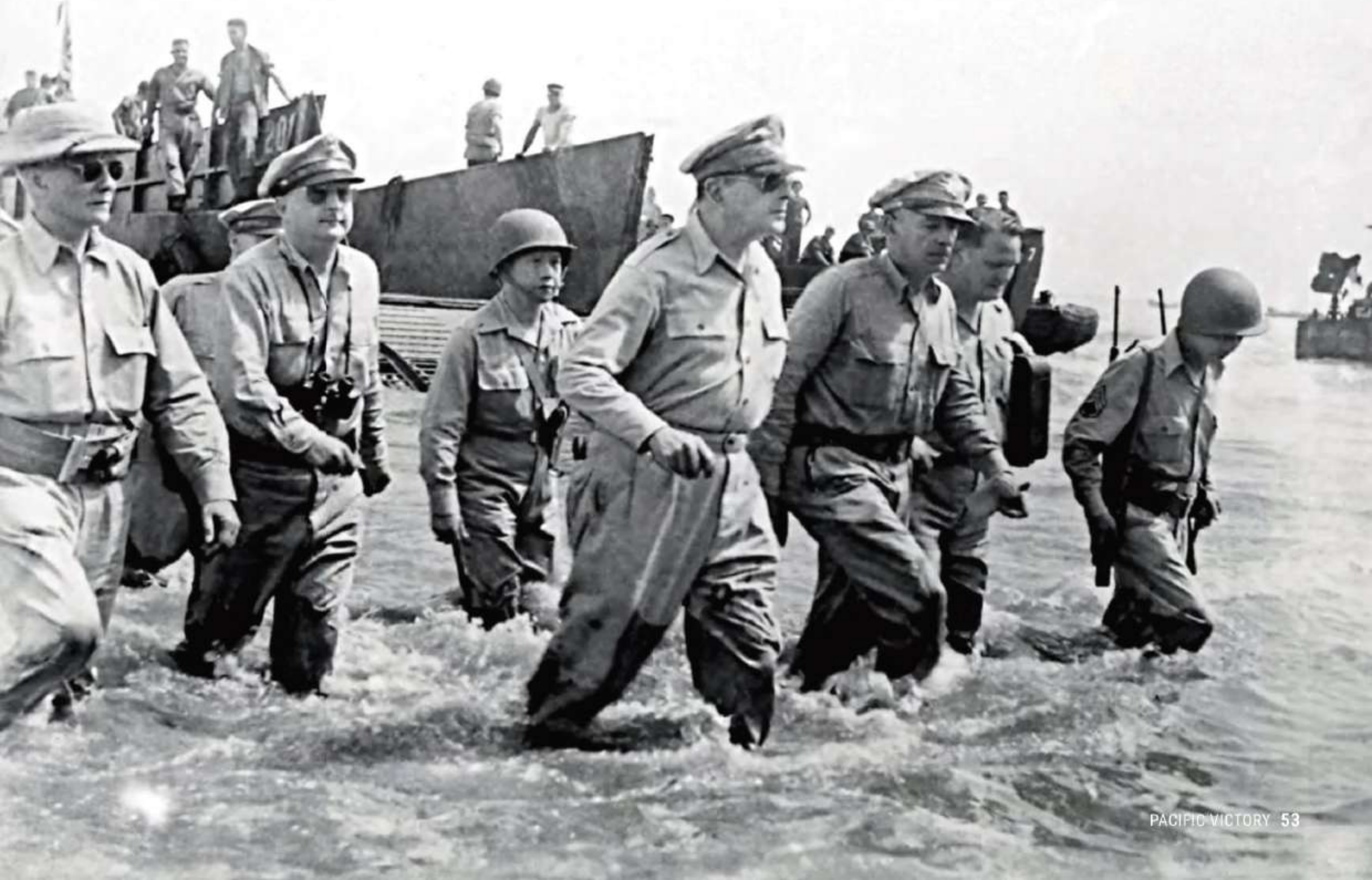
For General MacArthur, the Philippines meant Manila. The Philippines' capital had been his home when his father had been the Governor-General. It was where he had lived with his first and second wives, and where his son, Arthur MacArthur, had been born. After fighting his way, island by island, across the Pacific, he was poised to make good on his promise to liberate the Philippines – and to return home.

After his successful landing on Leyte, when he first stepped foot back on Philippine soil, General MacArthur's next move was to transport his forces closer to the main Philippine island of Luzon. The first step in this was the taking of Mindoro, the nation's seventh largest island, which was achieved in December 1944. From there, MacArthur intended to land on the Lingayen Gulf on the north-west of Luzon before advancing upon Manila.

Leading the amphibious assault on January 9, 1945 were the 40th Division and the 37th Division of the US Sixth Army. Casualties were heavy, as the Japanese fought with their habitual determination, but the American troops secured a foothold and began to drive southwards towards Manila.

Three weeks later, on January 31, the US Eighth Army landed unopposed at Nasugbu in southern Luzon and also began moving north toward Manila. »

MAIN PICTURE: An historic moment captured on camera. General Douglas MacArthur and his staff, accompanied by Philippine president Sergio Osmeña, wade ashore during the Allied landings at Leyte, in the Philippine Islands, on October 20, 1944. (NARA)



RIGHT: Naval personnel fighting fires on the landing ship USS LST-742, after she was hit by a Kamikaze off the Mindoro landing beaches on 15 December 1944. (USNHHC)

BELOW: General Douglas MacArthur and staff leaving USS *Boise* to go ashore on the Lingayen Gulf landing beaches, January 9, 1945. (USNHHC)

Japanese forces gave ground, being squeezed into a pocket around the capital, where Rear Admiral Sanji Iwabuchi, commander of the Imperial Japanese Navy's 31st Naval Special Base Force, was determined to fight it out to the death with his 12,500 men – despite being ordered to evacuate the city by the commander of the 14th Army, General Yamashita. He built defensive positions in the city, including the old Spanish Intramuros, cut down the palm trees on Dewey Boulevard (now Roxas Boulevard) to form a runway, and set up barricades across major streets.

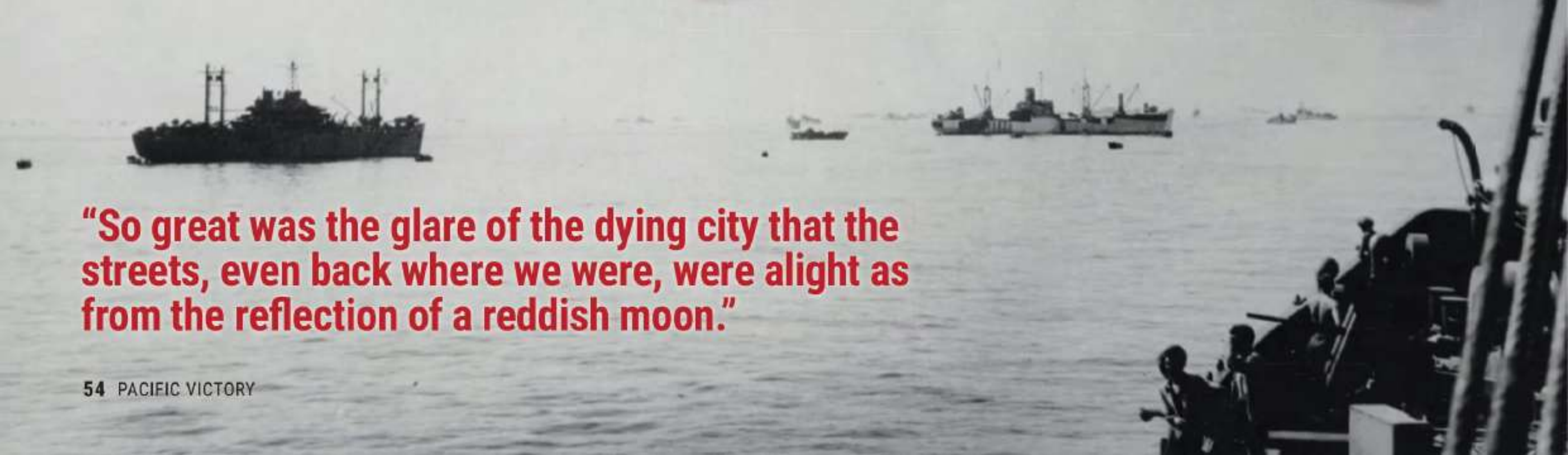
THE RAPE OF MANILA

The Battle of Manila began on February 4, 1945, with the XIV Army Corps' 37th Infantry Division setting out to drive south through the city while the 1st Cavalry Division undertook an enveloping movement from the east. The Japanese, for their part, needed to buy more time to strengthen their defences south of the River Pasig, which acted like a moat around the old heart of the city. To do this, they set fire to the buildings north of the river with the aim of slowing the American advance.

Major General Robert S Beightler, the 37th Division's commander, watched the northern part of Manila burn from the rooftop of his temporary headquarters. "The sky was a copper-burnished dome of thick clouds," he recalled. "So great was the glare of the dying city that the streets, even back where we were, were alight as from the reflection of a reddish moon. Great sheets of flame swept across the roof-tops, sometimes spanning several city blocks in their consuming flight. The roar, even at that distance, was like a Bessemer converter, and the earth shook frequently as yet more of the powerful demolition charges exploded, sending fountains of flame and debris in a hot, swirling eruption to meet the dense clouds overhead. We saw the awful pyrotechnics of destruction, spreading ever faster to encompass and destroy the most beautiful city in the Far East."[1]

So widespread was the conflagration, the Americans were forced to pull back. When the fighting resumed, it descended into deadly street battles. The streets themselves were mined, and from tall buildings Japanese snipers picked off unsuspecting Americans. Machine-gunners, ensconced in pillboxes or buildings and who had no intention of retreating or surrendering, only ceased firing when they were killed. With the Americans having great difficulty distinguishing between Filipinos and Japanese, numbers of the latter infiltrated US lines, pretending to be

RIGHT: A wall of anti-aircraft fire is put up at Japanese aircraft by the ships of the US Navy task force in Lingayen Gulf as the landings continued on January 10, 1945. (USNHHC)



BELOW: US transports unloading off the landing beaches in Lingayen Gulf on January 9, 1945. On the left is USS *Blue Ridge*, whilst to the right, sporting a distinctive camouflage pattern, is USS *Thuban*. (USNHHC)

"So great was the glare of the dying city that the streets, even back where we were, were alight as from the reflection of a reddish moon."

BELOW: Members of the Philippine Army paddle out to meet US forces landing at Nasugbu, just south of Manila Bay, on January 31, 1945. The American flag flying on their craft had been hidden and preserved throughout the Japanese occupation. (National Museum of the US Navy)

ABOVE: US Navy landing ships, including LCI-963, LSM-65, and LSM-54, are pictured in the final moments of their approach to the beaches at Nasugbu on January 31, 1945. (USNHHC)

LEFT: The liberation of another of the Philippine islands, in this case Panay, the sixth largest, underway on March 18, 1945. The troops sheltering behind the tanks pushing forward are from the 40th Division's 185th Infantry Regiment. This image was printed from a roll of film recovered from the camera of Lieutenant Robert Fields, a photographer with the US Army Signal Corps, who was killed in action shortly after it was taken. (NARA)

Filipino guerrillas, causing mayhem before they too were killed.

MacArthur did not want to inflict damage upon Manila, but Iwabuchi's resolute stand left him with little choice. Artillery and tanks began the systematic destruction of the city as they drove the Japanese from building to building.

One Filipino resident, schoolgirl Carmen Guerra Nakpil, recalled the horrors of the American bombardment: "It was like a scene from hell. It was like one of those lithographs you see illustrating the Bible, it was like the end of the world… The Americans pulverized every square inch of south Manila… everything was flattened by the barrage, and there we were, we were bombed and shelled, we were running like rats. I saw my classmates dragged through the streets, they were raped by the Japanese in Bay View Hotel. I saw my neighbours cut down by sniper bullets, and the killing was terrible."

The Bay View Hotel incident was one of the most despicable of all the atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese. The residents of an entire district, Ermita, were ordered to vacate their homes and were herded into Ferguson Plaza in front of the hotel. There the men were separated from the women, with the latter being forced into the hotel and locked in rooms. Each night, the Japanese soldiers would select the women they wanted and take them away to be raped all night. This continued for a week.

Many Filipinos had never accepted Japanese authority, and large numbers had gathered together to mount a continuous guerrilla campaign against the invaders. Worried that there were many such guerrillas in Manila waiting for the opportunity to strike at the Japanese, an order was issued as follows: "All people on the battlefield with the exception of Japanese military personnel, Japanese civilians, and special construction units will be put to death." This included women and children. As a result, there were many terrible instances of large-scale murders. One such included the assault upon a club where approximately 1,500 civilians had gathered for safety. In a bid to drive out the Filipinos, the Japanese blockaded the club's entrance and then threw burning materials inside. A small group of females, some carrying babies, went out to explain to the Japanese that they were all unarmed civilians. "They went and knelt before them [the Japanese]," recalled one witness, Franciso Lopez, "and begged for mercy, but the Japs ripped babies from mothers' arms and then started tearing off women's and young girls' clothes and raping them. I saw at least twenty Japs abuse one thirteen-year-old girl. I saw at least three girls lying on the ground after being repeatedly raped."[2]

Squads of Japanese rampaged through the residential areas, looking for houses swollen with refugees. When they spotted a likely target, they often entered and bayonetted or shot everyone inside, or set fire to the houses and opened fire on anyone who tried to escape. Where they found groups of people in air raid shelters, the Japanese seemed to take great delight throwing in hand grenades.

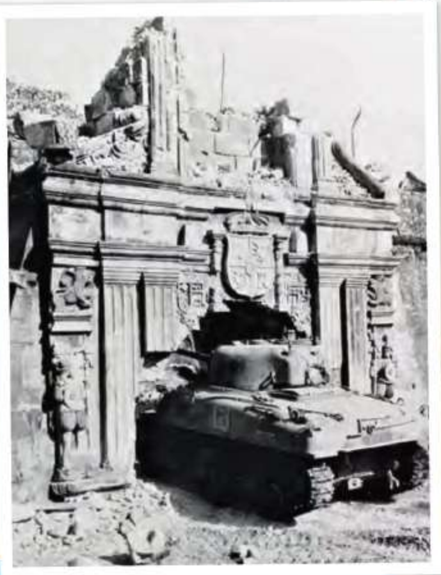
In the post-war investigation into the war crimes committed by the Japanese, one Filipina survivor, Gregoria Alinabon, testified that she had been one of a large group of people, "who were ordered to get in line by the Japanese. There were about 1,000 men, women and children who were told to sit down. They were then machine gunned." Even the Red Cross hospital was not spared, the Japanese bayonetting not just the nurses and doctors, but even patients being prepared for surgery.

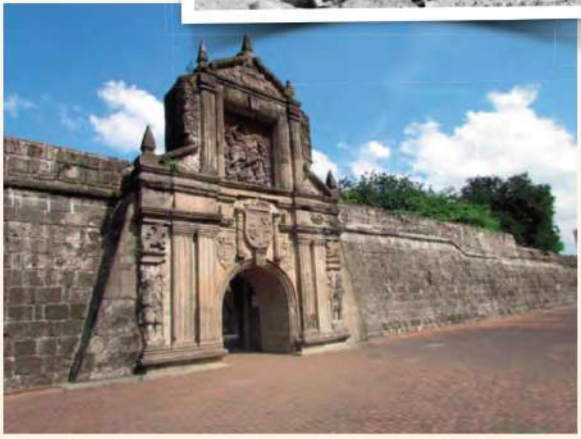
Among the carnage, the following order was issued to the Japanese »

BELOW: A stretcher party brings out a wounded US soldier during the fighting in Manila's old walled city of Intramuros, February 23, 1945.

FAR RIGHT: Troops of the US Army's 40th Division advancing through Bacolod on the island of Negros during its liberation on March 30, 1945. (Historic Military Press)

RIGHT: A US Army M-4 Sherman squeezes through a badly damaged gateway at the old Spanish conquistador citadel of Fort Santiago in the Intramuros district of Manila, February 26, 1945. (James Luto Collection)





ABOVE: Repaired after the war, this is the same gateway today. (Shutterstock)

BELOW: An LCM is pictured approaching the small port of Pulupandan, near Bacolod on the Philippine island of Negros, during the 40th Division's landings there on March 29, 1945. (Historic Military Press)

regarding other captives: "Because the disposal of dead bodies is a troublesome task, they should be gathered into houses which are scheduled to be burned or demolished. They should also be thrown into the river." Many were, and others suffered equally terrible treatment, as another witness recalled: "Several hundred innocents were beheaded, bayonetted, or shot only because they angered or displeased the Japanese. On one street… all the inhabitants, including the women and children, were murdered. The men were wired together, drenched with gasoline, and set afire with grenades."[3]

"WE REALLY WENT TO TOWN"

The crossing of the River Pasig by the American troops marked the start of the end of the struggle for Manila. The first stage in crossing the river was the capture of Provisor Island which sits in mid-stream, and from there it was a short step to the old city and the walled city of Intramuros.

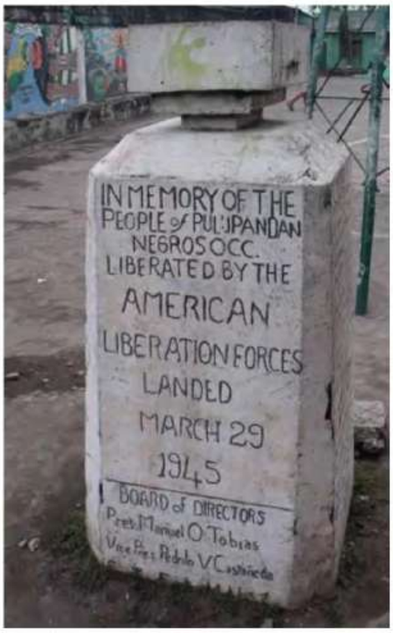
Though the Americans did not want to damage the city's buildings, casualties in the street fighting had been heavy, and rather than lose time and men in a continuation of such warfare, it was decided to use the tanks and the artillery to pound every obstacle into rubble, as XIV Army Corps' after-action report noted: "Every effort had been made to spare the civilian population known to be held in captivity somewhere in the area, but as the tactical need for heavy fire power increased, permission was sought and obtained to place artillery fire in front of our advancing lines without regard to pinpoint targets. Literal destruction of a building in advance of the area of friendly troops became essential."

By February 20, only Intramuros and three other buildings remained in Japanese hands. The latter, continued XIV Corps' account, "had been laboriously converted by the Japanese into individual fortresses of the most formidable type, with sandbagged gun emplacements and barricades in the doors and windows covering all approaches to each building as well as adjacent ones. Machine guns within the buildings themselves were sited to fire down corridors, stairways, and even inside rooms."

Assaulting these would be deadly, but for two days, from the 24th to the morning of the 26th, the buildings were hammered with massive and intensive artillery barrages. At 09.00 hours on the 26th, the 148th Infantry Regiment launched its assault upon the Legislative Building. The Japanese who had survived the shelling fought to the death, defending every inch of the battered ruins. The men of the 5th Cavalry Regiment were delayed in their attack upon the Agricultural Building until the 28th, but this allowed the American artillery to batter the building for a further two days.

By then, "the destruction appeared so complete", the official US history records, "that as the cavalrymen moved in from the south they felt that not a

"We made a churned-up pile of dust and scrap out of the imposing, classic government buildings."



LEFT: **A memorial commemorating the landing of the 40th Division at Pulupandan in the province of Negros Occidental. The beach there was codenamed Green Beach – and is still known by the locals by that name.** (John Grehan Collection)

MIDDLE: **In the central plaza of Bacolod is this memorial to Private First Class Theodore Vinther, who was killed securing the Bago River bridge.** (John Grehan Collection)

single Japanese could be alive amid the mass of twisted steel and concrete rubble".[4] They were wrong. It took the cavalrymen all day to clear the Japanese who were above ground, but some continued to resist in the basement. After an appeal to surrender had been ignored, petrol was poured through the holes in the floor and ignited.

Meanwhile, the Japanese in Intramuros had to be dealt with. With its 20-foot-high stone walls, which were 40 feet wide at the base, still intact, Intramuros was a formidable fortress. But the old walls could not withstand the battering of modern artillery, of which XIV Corp's Major General Oswald Griswold noted: "We really went to town. We used these shells and plastered the Walled City until it was a mess. It fell to us with ease we never expected. We made a churned-up pile of dust and scrap out of the imposing, classic government buildings." The American guns had blasted a number of breaches in the walls through which the US troops stormed on February 23. Finally, after three days of bitter fighting, the old Walled City, or at least what was left of it, was secured.

On March 1, just one single building, the Finance Building, remained in Japanese hands. It was reduced to rubble by the following day and when the American troops took control of the ruins the Battle of Manila was at an end. Iwabuchi and his officers had committed *seppuku*, ritual suicide, three days earlier, at dawn on February 26.

The taking of Manila cost the Americans more than 1,000 killed and 5,500 wounded; 16,665 Japanese were killed. It was, though, the Filipinos who suffered both the destruction of their city and also the heaviest casualties, with possibly as many as 240,000 losing their lives in one of the most dreadful episodes of the Second World War.

MacArthur had returned as promised, but at a staggering cost. "As I passed through the streets with their burned out piles of rubble," he recalled, "the air still filled with the stench of decaying unburied dead, the tall and stately trees that had been the mark of a gracious city were nothing but ugly scrub pointing broken fingers at the sky. Once famous buildings were now shells. The street signs and familiar landmarks were gone. One moved by sense of direction rather than sight."[5]

NEGROS OCCIDENTAL

The liberation of Manila, unfortunately, did not mean the end of Japanese resistance in the Philippines. To the south of Luzon Island was the large Japanese-held island of Negros. After Luzon, Negros was the most important base for the Japanese 18th Army, which was commanded by Lieutenant General Takeshi Kono. With between 12,000 and 13,500 men (figures vary), it had the largest concentration of Japanese forces to the south of Luzon, though not all of these were combat troops, and stocks of ammunition for those troops that were armed was low. Under the codename *Victor 1*, Major General Rapp Brush's 40th Division, with the 503 Parachute Regimental Combat Team under its command, was ordered to take Negros.

The Japanese forces in the north-west of Negros, known as Negros Occidental, where the US landings were to take place, were those of the 77th Brigade of Lieutenant General Shinpei Fukue's 102nd Division, though three of the brigade's five battalions had been detached to defend other islands. Kono's small force was supplemented by other units made up from the service and support elements, including 7,500 men of the Fourth Air Army and 500 naval personnel,[6] and were far from being considered first-class soldiers. By this stage of the war the Japanese in Negros Occidental were largely cut off from the rest of the island, with the Filipino resistance fighters having gained control of the mountainous interior.

Kono knew that he could not hope to defend the coastline with so few men and chose instead to concentrate his defence of Negros Occidental to the north-west of the city of Bacolod where a line of mountains provided a strong defensive position. As a result, when the Americans landed on March 29, they met no opposition. »

BELOW LEFT: **It was essential that the Bago River bridge was captured intact, a task that was achieved by 'F' Company of the 185th Regiment. Though the bridge survived the war, nature overcame it in the form of typhoon Ruping in 1991. All that remains today are some of the old pillars in the water, as well as some of the brick at each end.** (John Grehan Collection)

LEFT: **On what was the approaches to the high ground ahead of Hill 3155 many surviving Japanese 'spider holes' and caves are to be found. That seen here are located near to the former hospital, which is now the Patag camping site, and where the Nagano Detachment of the Japanese Imperial Army retreated to make its last stand.** (John Grehan Collection)

BELOW: **Troops from the 40th Division warily clearing the streets of Bacolod of any remaining Japanese resistance.** (Historic Military Press)

ABOVE: **This Japanese 20mm anti-aircraft machine-gun, on a naval pedestal mount, was discovered when a water buffalo accidentally disappeared down a hole which turned out to be a hidden Japanese bunker. As well as the gun, ten crates of ammunition as well as skeletal remains and other relics, were also recovered. The gun is now to be seen, near where it was found, at the Patag camping site.** (John Grehan Collection)

ABOVE RIGHT: **A United States Army press photograph of Medal of Honor recipient John Carleton Sjogren.** (John Grehan Collection)

BELOW: **Hill 3155 pictured looking southeast before the final assault by the US Army's 40th Division.** (Historic Military Press)

Leading the assault was Lieutenant Aaron H. Hanson with a strengthened platoon from 'F' Company of the 185th Regiment. He and his men went ashore before dawn, four hours ahead of the main landings, and seized the Bago River bridge, the first of nine bridges which lay along the division's route from the landing site to Bacolod. Hanson's capture of the first bridge enabled the Americans to advance so rapidly thereafter that they were able to seize each bridge in turn. Bacolod itself was taken the following day, March 30.

By early April the 40th Division had captured most of the coastal plain of north-western Negros, the Japanese having retreated to their stronghold in the mountains, which are dominated by the 6,184-foot Mandalagan volcano. When the 40th reached the lower slopes of the mountain range, it came under heavy mortar and automatic fire, the men having to creep cautiously past booby-traps and minefields, scrambling ever uphill across open fields of fire. The defenders had stripped heavy machine-guns from wrecked aircraft and fitted them to improvised mounts. Anti-aircraft guns were also turned on the attackers.

The 160th Regiment eventually reached the foot of Hill 3155, which was soon to become known as Dolan Hill after First Lieutenant John W Dolan, of 'C' Company of the 160th's 1st Battalion, became the first US officer to be killed on its slopes. Hill 3155 commanded the approaches to the Patag area from the west and was understood to form the flank of the enemy's defensive line. Holding the hill were elements of Colonel Yamaguchi's 172nd Independent Infantry Battalion, and probably elements of the 102nd Division Transport Regiment, the 32nd Airfield Company, and the 61st Anchorage Unit. As the battle for the hill progressed, most of the remainder of the 172nd Battalion and elements of the 355th Independent Infantry Battalion were drawn into the defence of this key Japanese position.

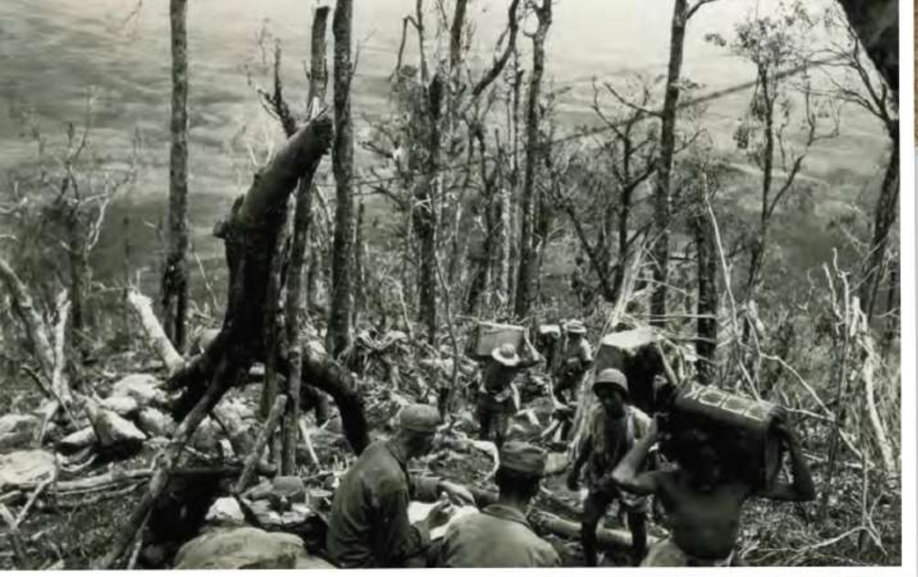
GRENADE JOHN

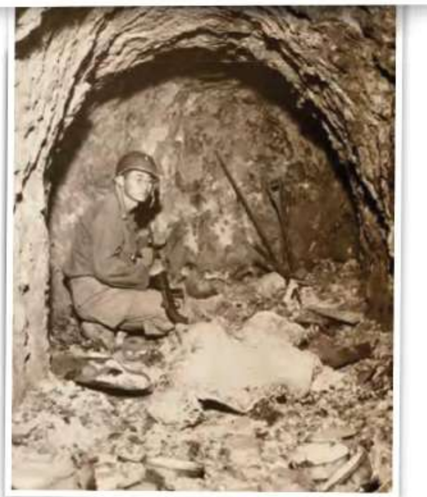
During this phase of the operation, which began on May 15, the US troops had to fight uphill through heavy rain forest and steep mountains. Temperatures dropped as the Americans penetrated higher and higher into the ranges, and it was necessary to issue field jackets to the troops because of the cold.

Eventually, on May 23, 'C' Company of the 160th's 1st Battalion was ordered to attack the summit of Hill 3155 just before dawn. The night before the assault, Staff Sergeant John C Sjogren's platoon had undertaken a careful reconnaissance of the enemy positions on the hill and so he and his men were selected to lead the war. Though the decision had been taken to undertake a flanking attack, rather than mounting a direct frontal assault, many regarded the plan as being nothing short of suicidal.

On that fateful morning, a divisional artillery concentration was laid on the area. When the fire was lifted the infantry closed in and Sjogren led his men up the hill, the approach being so narrow that only one squad at a time could move along it. The Japanese

ABOVE: **A battery of 155mm howitzers of the 40th Division fire on the Japanese positions during the liberation of the island of Negros.** (Historic Military Press)





knew that the enemy was coming and, on the alert, heard Sjogren's squad approaching. The Japanese opened fire with their machine-guns, spraying the slopes from their well-sealed pillboxes and entrenched caves, unsure of exactly where the attackers were. No-one could dare advance further.

But Staff Sergeant Sjogren had no intention of giving up. "I told the rest of my squad to start passing up hand grenades, which they thought I was being a fool as this would give away our position," he later told the *Rockford Squire*. "But I started heaving them wherever I figured [they] were. I could hear them holler. Bullets were flying all around us. Sometimes I threw them from my knees and other times on my belly. I was lying behind a log a few yards ahead of my unit and I could see some of the [enemy soldiers] starting to take off. I shouted, 'Let's go!' and we pushed ahead.

"I was watching a pillbox when a [soldier] who was playing dead fired three shots at me," he continued. "They went right past my ear and I hit the ground. I don't see how he missed! My second shot knocked him down with a rifle and I crawled up and threw a grenade into the hold. Then we moved on up and blasted a machine gun position."

As Sjogren's squad pressed on up the steep slope, he saw another pillbox. He advanced directly into the enemy fire, killing eight Japanese in spider holes guarding the approach to the pillbox. "Crawling to within a few feet of the pillbox, while his men concentrated their bullets on the fire port, he began dropping grenades through the narrow firing slit," explained an official account of his actions. "The enemy immediately threw two or three of these unexploded grenades out, and fragments from one wounded him in the hand and back. However, by hurling grenades through the embrasure faster than the enemy could return them, he succeeded in destroying the occupants."

After silencing that pillbox Sjogren once again moved forward to the next one: "I squirmed up close enough to toss a grenade through the hole in the top of the pillbox. My squad kept picking them off as they tried to run from their holes. They also kept me covered as I crept up close to one pillbox after another. Sometimes I threw a grenade from 20 yards and sometimes I got within a yard and pushed grenades in."

To the consternation of his comrades, Sjogren held each grenade for two seconds after he had pulled out the safety pin before he threw it, helping prevent the enemy from throwing them back. His platoon claimed that he threw 120 grenades during the battle on the ridge, after which, understandably, the men began calling him "Grenade John". At one pillbox, Sjogren grabbed hold of the barrel of the Japanese light machine-gun and wrenched it from the enemy gunner's hands and pulled it out through the embrasure, before blowing up the occupants with yet more hand grenades.

MEDAL OF HONOR

In total, Staff Sergeant Sjogren silenced an astonishing nine enemy pillboxes and killed forty-three Japanese. After fifty hours of continuous fighting, the hilltop was secured with the help of another company and the Japanese position was overrun. Some 129 enemy dead were counted in the area, fifteen machine-guns were captured, and forty-two pillboxes destroyed. The last of the enemy's basic combat units, the 172nd Independent Infantry Battalion of the 77th Brigade, had been destroyed. During the next few days, several enemy stragglers were killed, but the battle for Dolan Hill, the core of the enemy defence on Negros Occidental, was over.

On June 4, 1945, the Japanese began a general withdrawal, retreating even farther into the unexplored mountains of the region. After eight weeks and at a cost to itself of 370 dead and 1,025 wounded, the 40th Division overcame these final defences, killing more than 4,000 Japanese and scattering the remainder far into the jungles. More than 3,300 Japanese subsequently died from starvation and disease, leaving 6,000 to surrender at the end of the war.[7]

Following his assault on Hill 3155, Staff Sergeant Sjogren was offered a field promotion to second lieutenant, which he accepted. He was also, understandably, awarded the Medal of Honor.

LEFT: Filipinos help to carry supplies up the steep slopes of Hill 3155 in preparation for the final assault upon the Japanese positions on the summit. As can be seen, the trees have been stripped bare by the 40th Division's artillery bombardment. (Historic Military Press)

LEFT: A soldier from the 40th Division inspects the inside of a captured Japanese cave on what is believed to be the island of Negros. (Historic Military Press)

BOTTOM LEFT: This Japanese shrine, located near the Patag camping site, is dedicated to the soldiers of all three nations involved in the fighting on Negros. (John Grehan Collection)

ABOVE: The countryside around Hill 3155 is still littered by caves cut out of the rock, some large enough for lorries to be driven into. This particular one is clearly capable of holding a number of soldiers in comparative safety from the American bombing and shelling. An alcove has signs of smoke on its roof. (John Grehan Collection)

NOTES:

1. R S Beightler, *Report on the Activities of the 37th Infantry Division 1940-1945* (1945).
2. Jonathan Lewis and Ben Steele, *From Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima and Beyond, Hell in the Pacific* (Channel 4 Books, London, 2001), pp.203-4.
3. Richard Connaughton et al, *The Battle of Manila* (Bloomsbury, London, 1995), p.112.
4. Robert Ross Smith, *United States Army in WWII. The War in the Pacific* (Washington, 1963), p.173.
5. Quoted in Miguel Miranda, *Battle of Manila*, (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2019), p.88.
6. Waldo Heinrichs and Marc Gallicchio, *Implacable Foes: War in the Pacific, 1944-1945* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p.334.
7. Stephen J. Lofgren, *Retaking the South Philippines Islands*, an official account, p.17.

THE GREATEST BATTLE

With the war turning against the Japanese, their Imperial Navy was committed to one last major offensive – on a scale the world had never before seen.

The day after General MacArthur's 6th Army had landed on Leyte Island on October 20, 1944, the Japanese Chief of the Naval Staff issued a directive for "urgent operations". Those urgent operations took the form of attacking the two US fleets which were supporting and protecting the American campaign in the Philippines.

The two fleets in question were the Seventh Fleet under Admiral Thomas Kinkaid, whose superior was General MacArthur, and the Third Fleet under Admiral 'Bull' Halsey, whose superior was Admiral Nimitz. The Seventh Fleet, with its six battleships, sixteen escort carriers, four heavy cruisers, four light cruisers and ten escorts, had escorted the invasion convoy and stood by to protect MacArthur's force as it disembarked, not just its fighting men but all their supplies and equipment.

The Third Fleet was composed of Task Force 38 under Admiral Mitscher. It consisted of four task groups, each of which roughly comprised two large carriers, two light carriers, two new battleships, three cruisers, and around fourteen destroyers. The task force was to secure air supremacy over the Philippines, as well as cover and protect the Seventh Fleet. But Nimitz also gave Halsey another purpose: "In case opportunity for destruction of major portions of the enemy fleet offers or can be created, such destruction becomes the primary task." This certainly got Halsey's attention, as he subsequently wrote to Nimitz: "My goal is the same as yours – to completely annihilate the Jap fleet if the opportunity offers."[1]

That opportunity would soon present itself, for Admiral Soemu Toyoda, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet, aimed to try and disrupt the American landings in a do-or-die mission involving the whole of his fleet. "If things went well, we might obtain unexpectedly good results," he later explained, "but if the worst should happen, there was a chance that we would lose the entire fleet. But I felt that that chance had to be taken… Should we lose in the Philippines operations, even though the fleet should be left, the shipping lane to the south would be completely cut off, so that the fleet, if it should come back to Japanese waters, could not obtain its fuel supply. If it should remain in southern waters, it could not receive supplies of ammunition and arms. There would be no sense in saving the fleet at the expense of the Philippines."[2]

The opposing fleets were determined to fight in a winner-takes-all clash which would be the largest naval battle in history.

FIRST CONTACT

The Imperial Japanese Navy's plan to defend the Philippines, Operation *Shō-Gō1*, initially involved three separate forces. The first, the Task Force Main Body, referred to as the 'Northern Force' consisting primarily of carriers under Vice Admiral Jisaburo Ozawa, would sortie from Japan and approach the

MAIN PICTURE: The ships of the Japanese 'Centre Force' leave Brunei Bay, Borneo, on October 22, 1944, en route to the Philippines. They are are, from right to left, the battleships *Nagato*, *Musashi* and *Yamato*, followed by the heavy cruisers *Maya*, *Chokai*, *Takao*, *Atago*, *Haguro* and *Myōkō*. (USNHHC)

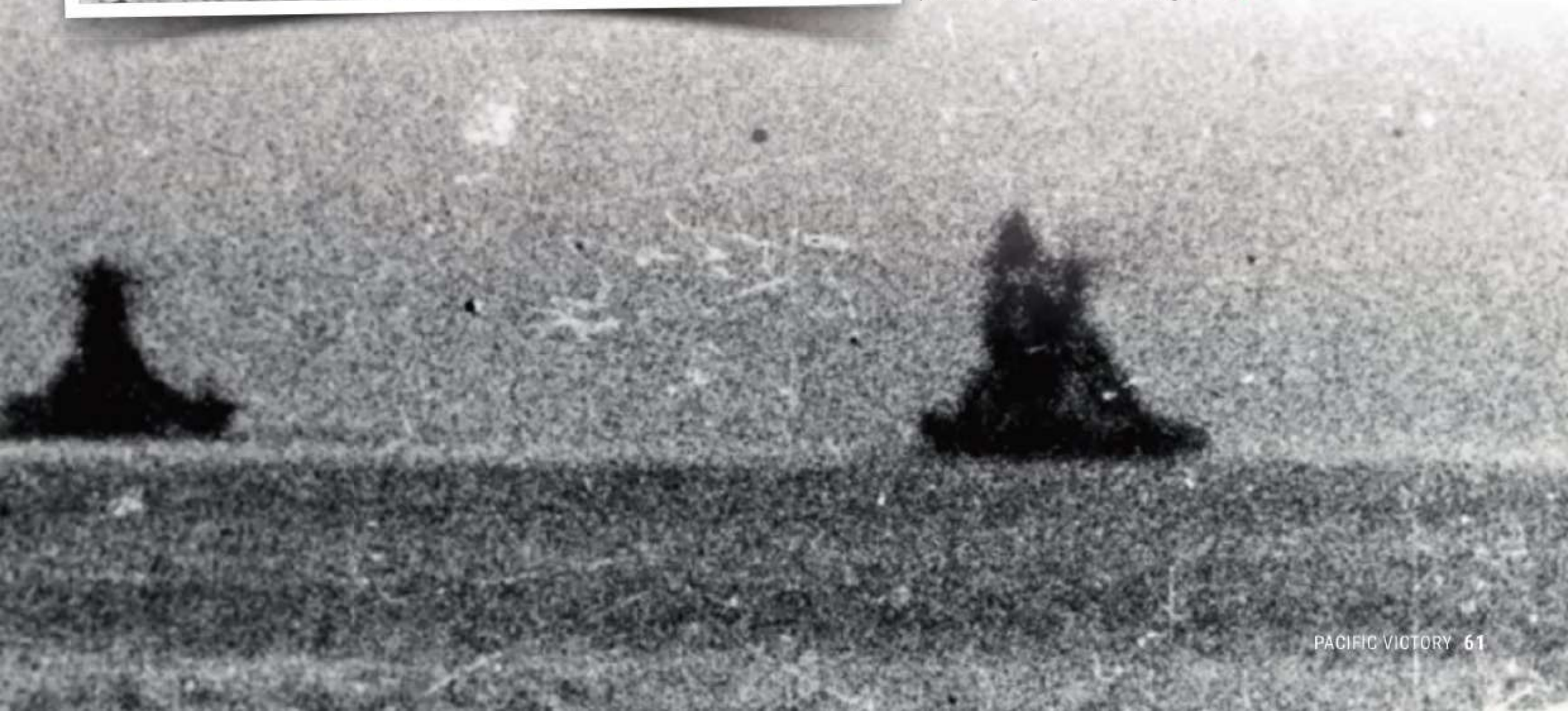
MIDDLE RIGHT: The American submarine USS *Darter* pictured aground on Bombay Shoal, off southwest Palawan in the western Philippines, after its successful attack on the Japanese fleet. (USNHHC)

Philippines from the north, stationing itself off the island of Luzon. This body, composed mainly of aircraft carriers, albeit with few actual aircraft on board, would act as the 'bait', drawing the American covering forces away from the landing beaches. Once the US Third Fleet had been enticed away from Leyte, Vice Admiral Shōji Nishimura's Second Striking Force, or 'Southern Force', would then draw off the US Seventh Fleet. With the landing ships then unprotected, Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita's First Striking Force, the 'Centre Force', would easily be able to swoop in and destroy the landing craft, leaving the Allied troops stranded until a counter-invasion could be launched to wipe them out. But that, or something like it, was what Halsey was hoping for.

In order that a suitable early warning might be had of the approach of any hostile naval forces, US Navy submarines had been tasked with patrolling to a radius of 1,000 miles to the north and east of the Philippines. At the same time, carrier task forces of the Third Fleet and air searches by Central Pacific forces from Palau and Saipan were depended upon to give early information of the approach of enemy forces east of the Philippines.

It was the submarines which first raised the alarm. At 02.00 hours on October 23, Commander David Hayward McClintock of USS *Darter*, which was operating with its sister submarine, USS *Dace*, reported that he had made radar contact with three Japanese battleships making 15 knots to the south-west of Palawan Island. It was one of the most important messages of the war in the Pacific. Until that moment, the Americans had no idea where the Japanese fleet might be. »

ABOVE: **Pilots of Torpedo Squadron 13 (VT-13) in their ready room aboard USS *Franklin*, October 24, 1944, just before the Battle of the Sibuyan Sea. They are watching as the position of the Japanese fleet is posted. Note the life preservers, with die marker pouches, worn by several of the men.** (USNHHC)



ABOVE: A Grumman F6F Hellcat undergoing maintenance on board USS *Essex*. Nicknamed *Minsi II*, this is the aircraft belonging to the Essex Air Group Commander, Commander David McCampbell USN, albeit pictured earlier in 1944. (USNHHC)

RIGHT: McCampbell pictured in the cockpit of his Grumman F6F Hellcat on board USS *Essex* in October 1944. Note the 21 kills markings. (US Navy)

On the super-battleship *Yamato*, the lead ship of her class which were the heaviest and most powerfully armed battleships ever constructed, each fitted with nine 18.1-inch guns, the largest guns ever mounted on a warship, the radio room had intercepted *Darter*'s message to the US fleet and correctly recognized it as being close. Yet, inexplicably, no change whatsoever was made in the Japanese formation or its direction. As a result, the Japanese were entirely unprepared for what happened next.

McClintock fired *Darter*'s first six torpedoes at what was Admiral Kurita's flagship the heavy cruiser *Atago*. Four of the torpedoes hit the target, ripping open *Atago* from stem to stern. The cruiser capsized and sank in twenty minutes, taking 360 of its crew with it. Among the survivors was Kurita, who transferred his flag to *Yamato*.

It was then *Dace*'s turn, and in its sights was another heavy cruiser, *Maya*. Four torpedoes raced towards *Maya*, and all four smashed into the cruiser's port side. Convulsed with primary and secondary explosions, she sank with 336 men still on board, including her captain. The two submarines then withdrew. *Darter* ran aground and had to be abandoned, but her crew were taken off by *Dace*.

Kurita's Central Force was spotted a second time during the 23rd by the submarine USS *Angler*. Also, another report was received from the submarine *Bream* of a large force to the west of Luzon, and of elements of possibly another force – the yet unidentified Southern Force – south of Negros Island. The great battle that Halsey sought was almost upon him.

BATTLE OF THE SIBUYAN SEA

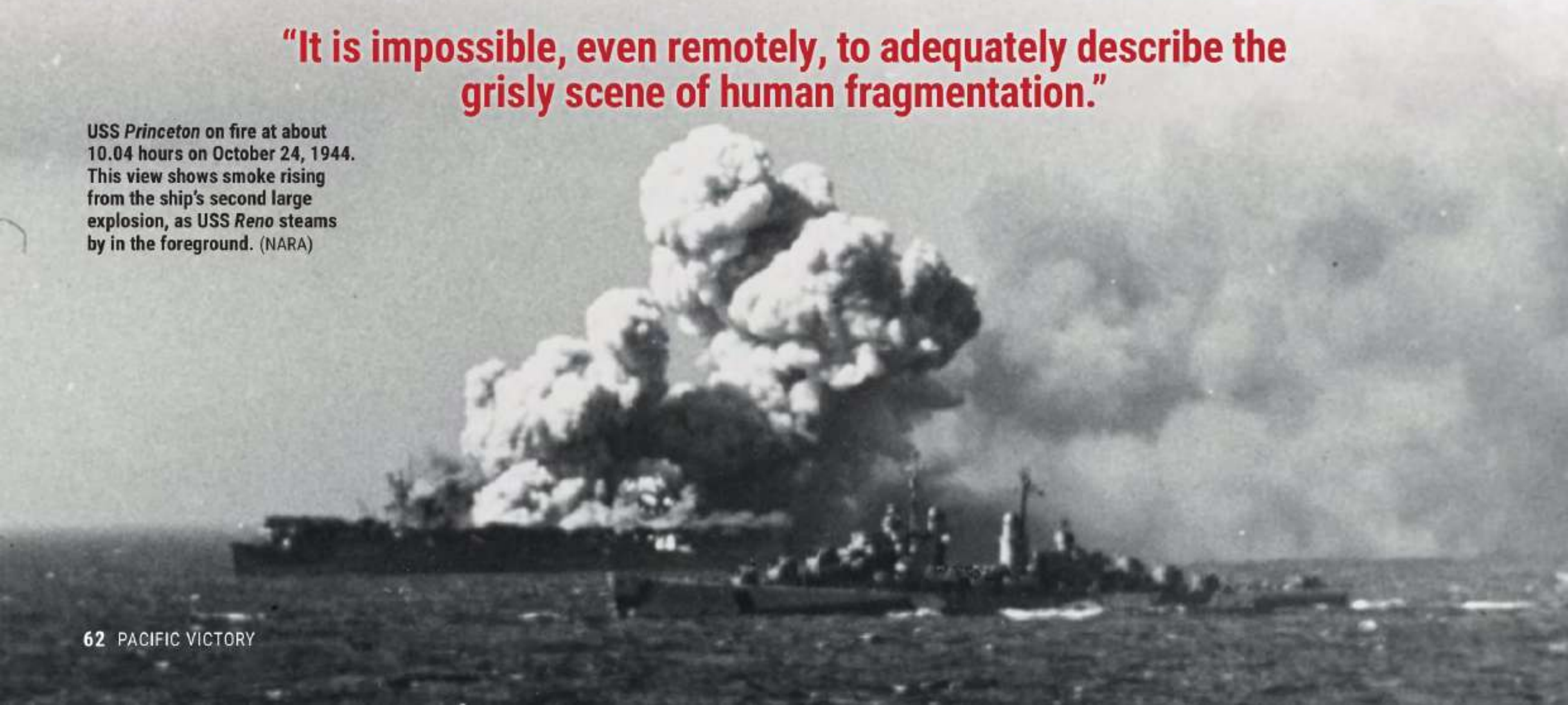
Kurita's ships were tracked by a single reconnaissance aircraft throughout the night of the 23/24th. At dawn on the 24th, this was increased to eight. None of those aircraft were sent to search to the north of Luzon, consequently, the Northern Force remained unknown to Halsey.

That was not the case with the Centre Force, and upon receiving word that it had entered the Sibuyan Sea, Halsey ordered his aircraft to launch at 08.33 hours with one simple instruction: "Strike! Repeat: strike!"

Over the course of the day, they did just that, mercilessly pounding the Japanese Centre Force with bombs and torpedoes while fending off incoming waves of Japanese aircraft launched from Luzon and other parts of the Philippines. However, Rear Admiral Sherman, commanding Task Force 38.3 in the fleet carrier USS *Essex*, picked up a report of a large Japanese force south of Mindoro Island – the Southern Force – and he immediately issued orders to his aircraft to prepare an attack upon this enemy fleet, which included four battleships. But before his aircraft could launch, enemy shore-based aircraft were detected approaching from Luzon.

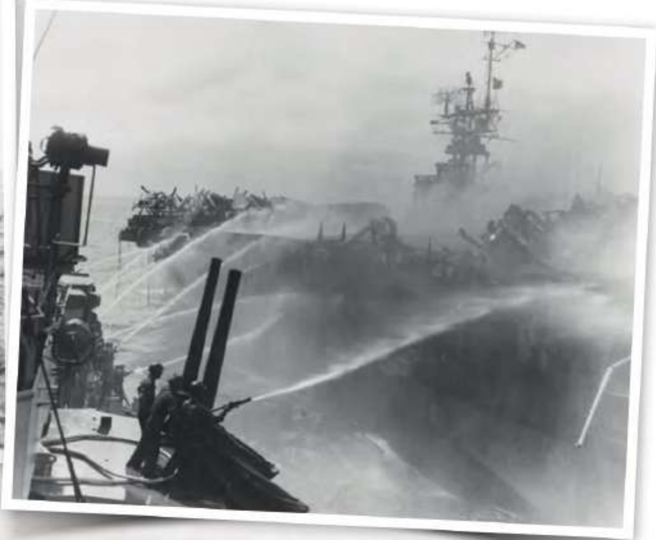
There were already fighter and anti-submarine patrols in the air above Sherman's group, and these were quickly reinforced to meet the Japanese aircraft.

"It is impossible, even remotely, to adequately describe the grisly scene of human fragmentation."

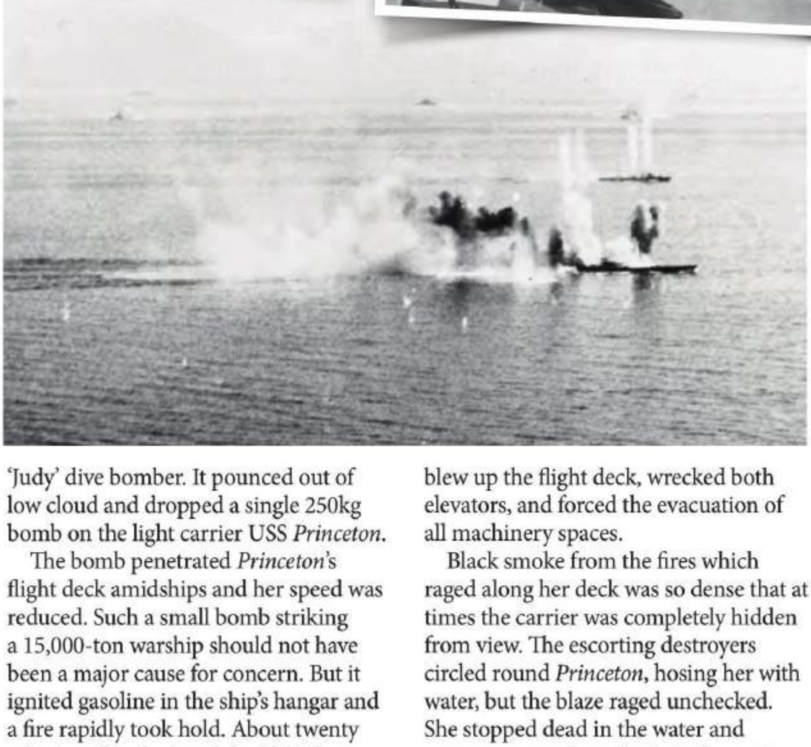


USS *Princeton* on fire at about 10.04 hours on October 24, 1944. This view shows smoke rising from the ship's second large explosion, as USS *Reno* steams by in the foreground. (NARA)

TOP LEFT: **USS *Birmingham*, at left, and a destroyer pull away from USS *Princeton* following the devastating explosion that destroyed the carrier's stern. Note how *Princeton*'s stern, and a good deal of her after superstructure, has been blown off.** (US Navy)



TOP RIGHT: **Crewmen on USS *Birmingham* play hoses on the burning USS *Princeton* as their ship comes alongside to assist in damage control measures, October 24, 1944.** (USNHHC)



ABOVE LEFT: **The Japanese battleship *Musashi* under heavy attack during the Battle of the Sibuyan Sea, October 24, 1944.** (USNHHC)

Then another large body of Japanese planes – between fifty and eighty – was detected, and every available aircraft was sent up by *Essex*, the other fleet carrier *Lexington* and the light carriers *Princeton* and *Langley*.

Soon, an enormous aerial battle raged in the skies. Leading Air Group Fifteen was Commander David McCampbell, who, "intercepted and daringly attacked a formation of sixty hostile land-based craft approaching our forces. Fighting desperately but with superb skill against such overwhelming airpower, he shot down nine Japanese planes and, completely disorganizing the enemy group, forced the remainder to abandon the attack before a single aircraft could reach the Fleet." These were the words on his citation for the Medal of Honor. With the award of the Navy Cross the next day, October 25, McCampbell is the only man ever to earn both of the US Navy's top two awards in successive days.

Despite such heroics, disaster was to strike Sherman's group. After about ninety minutes of combat, there was a lull in the fighting and the fighters, low on fuel and ammunition, they landed back on the carriers. The radar screens showed no signs of enemy aircraft but, unnoticed amid the returning American aircraft, was a lone Yokosuka D4Y Suisei 'Judy' dive bomber. It pounced out of low cloud and dropped a single 250kg bomb on the light carrier USS *Princeton*.

The bomb penetrated *Princeton*'s flight deck amidships and her speed was reduced. Such a small bomb striking a 15,000-ton warship should not have been a major cause for concern. But it ignited gasoline in the ship's hangar and a fire rapidly took hold. About twenty minutes after the bomb had hit, there occurred a series of heavy explosions in the hangar. Some of the torpedo warheads in the planes may have detonated or gasoline vapour may have exploded violently. These explosions blew up the flight deck, wrecked both elevators, and forced the evacuation of all machinery spaces.

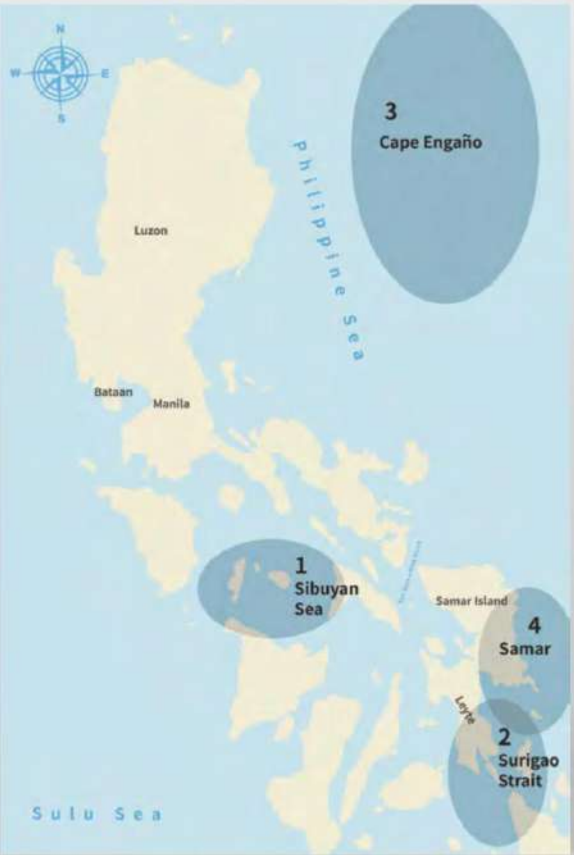
Black smoke from the fires which raged along her deck was so dense that at times the carrier was completely hidden from view. The escorting destroyers circled round *Princeton*, hosing her with water, but the blaze raged unchecked. She stopped dead in the water and men were seen jumping into the sea to avoid the flames. Around midday, the efforts of the other ships appeared to be having an effect as the fire seemed to be diminishing. This was only temporary, and a couple of hours later, black smoke again shrouded the carrier.

At 15.23 hours, the cruiser USS *Birmingham* moved alongside the carrier just as a massive explosion of some 400 general purpose bombs blew off *Princeton*'s entire stern. Not an officer or man left on the carrier escaped death or injury. Aboard *Birmingham*, the carnage was even worse. Her upper deck, crowded with men trying to fight the fire and manning the anti-aircraft guns, was raked with metal fragments and debris. Half her officers and men were killed or wounded in an instant. "It is impossible, even remotely, to adequately describe the grisly scene of human fragmentation," wrote her Executive Officer, who took over command from the badly-injured Captain Thomas B Inglis.[3] »

LEFT: **US Navy motor torpedo boats preparing for their part in the Battle of Surigao Strait, on or around October 24, 1944. In the foreground is USS *PT-131*.** (NARA)

RIGHT: **A Japanese battleship, either *Yamashiro* or *Fusō*, and the cruiser *Mogami* under attack on October 24.** (National Museum of the US Navy)

BELOW: **The geographic areas relating to the four main engagements that make up the Battle of Leyte Gulf.** (USNHHC)



USS *Princeton* was abandoned and later sunk by torpedoes. Though this was a terrific loss to the Task Force, the Japanese attack from Luzon cost them a staggering 150 aircraft shot down.

TASK FORCE 34

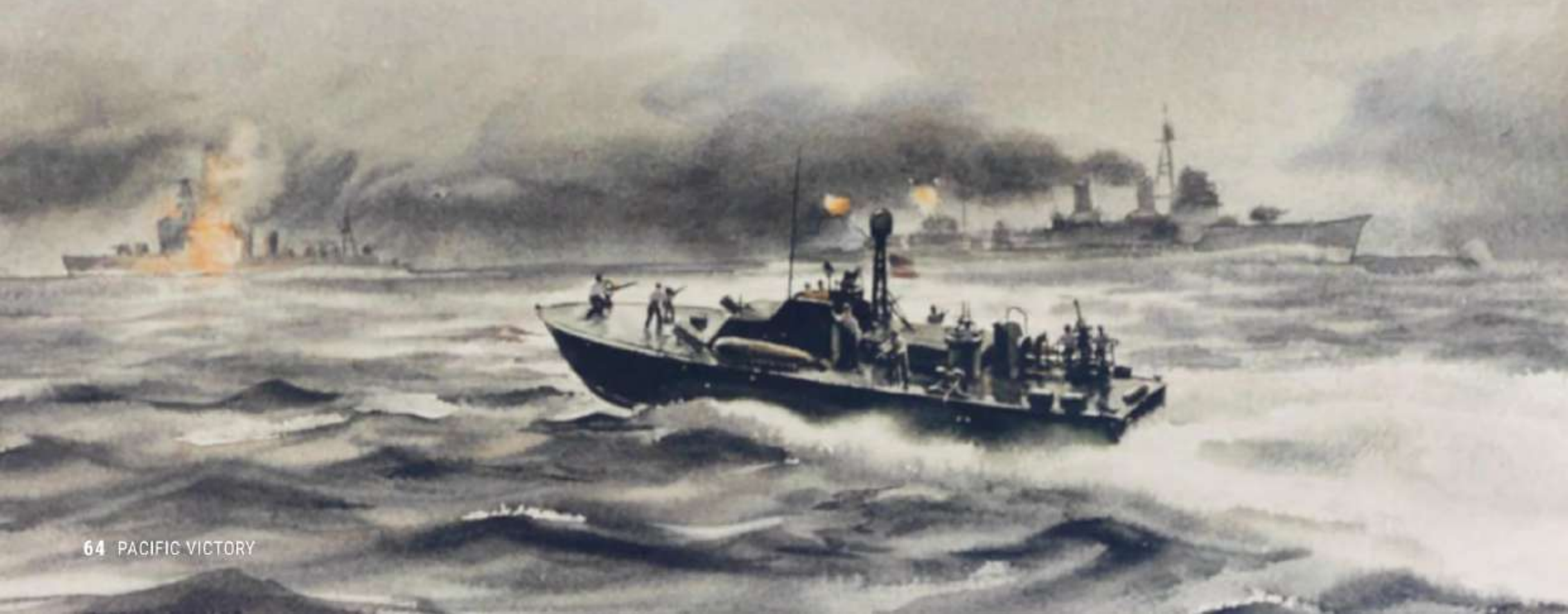
Meanwhile, as the survivors on *Princeton* were engaged in their futile fire-fighting efforts, Halsey's aircraft were endeavouring to exact due revenge on the Centre Force in the Sibuyan Sea. In all, they mounted a total of 350 sorties in six waves between 08.30 and 17.30 hours. The results from such an enormous effort were, perhaps, a little disappointing, in view of the fact that the Japanese warships were devoid of any aerial protection. Although the pilots made remarkable claims, whilst the battleships *Nagato* and *Yamato* were all hit, their battle worthiness was unaffected. The best results were that the heavy cruiser *Myōkō* was badly damaged, being forced to retire to Borneo, and *Musashi* eventually sank, but only after being hit with at least seventeen bombs and nineteen torpedoes.

Kurita's ships continued with their mission, heading towards Leyte through the San Bernadino Strait. They were tracked throughout the night of the 24/25th by reconnaissance aircraft from USS *Independence*. Halsey planned to smash the Japanese by directing all the ships under his command at the Centre Force. But, as a precaution, just in case Kurita slipped past the attacking US forces, he wanted to be able to respond quickly and block the San Bernadino Strait. He informed his task force commanders that if compelled to send a force into the Strait he would form a temporary task force – Task Force 34 – to deal with that scenario. Unfortunately, the message Halsey sent to his subordinates explaining this was misinterpreted by Admiral Kinkaid of the Seventh Fleet, who thought that TF 34 was already in existence and that it was covering the San Bernadino Strait.

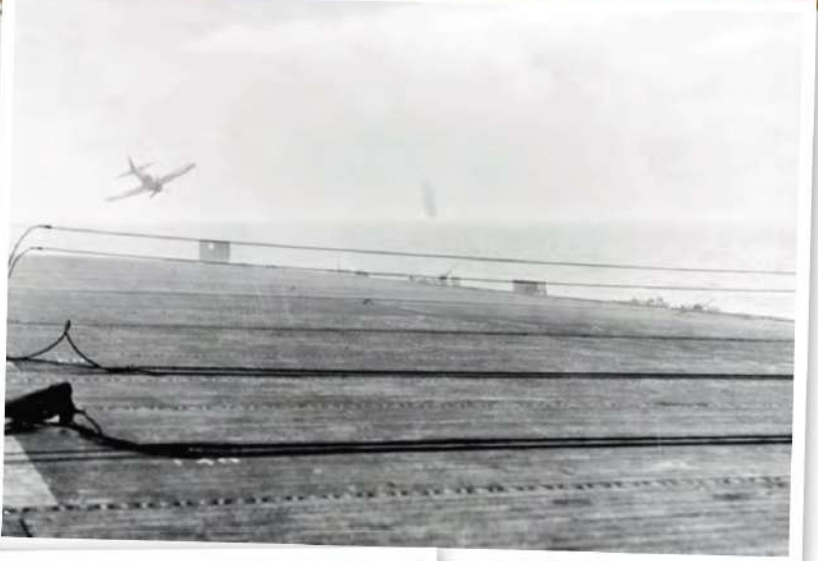
The situation, however, was changing. Halsey was acutely aware that so far there had been no sightings of any Japanese carriers. "It was evident that the Japanese navy was making a major effort," but, as he later wrote in his despatch, "there was one piece missing in the puzzle – the carriers". In the late afternoon of the 24th, the missing piece was found. Reports reached him of the Japanese Northern Force, with varying numbers of enemy carriers and other ships being claimed.

From the speed of the, then known, three enemy groups, it appeared that they were aiming to rendezvous at some pre-determined point. The wildly inaccurate claims made by the US pilots in their attack upon the Centre Force led Halsey to believe that its fighting ability had been severely damaged and that it was the Northern Force with its carriers that posed the greatest threat, which is exactly what the Japanese had planned.

BELOW: **A painting depicting warships, large and small, in action during the Battle of Surigao Strait.** (Courtesy of the Curator for Department of the Navy)



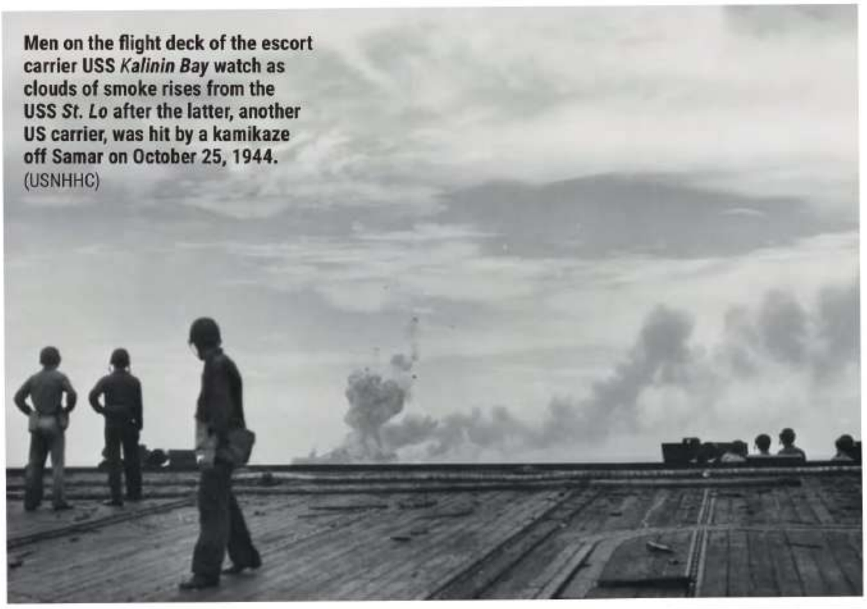
On the assumption that the weakened Centre Force and the small Southern Force could be easily dealt with by Kincaid's Seventh Fleet, Halsey decided to concentrate all his strength against the Northern Force. This meant that he would not be forming TF 34. He ordered his ships to assemble at a point 150 miles north-east of the San Bernadino Strait, and to be ready for a dawn attack.



LEFT: **On October 25, the newly formed Japanese Kamikaze Special Attack Force carried out its first organised mission, the pilots involved aiming for the US Navy carriers. This image shows a Mitsubishi A6M Zero attempting a kamikaze attack on USS *White Plains* off Samar. Just missing its target, the Zero crashed just off the carrier's port side.** (National Museum of the US Navy)

BATTLE OF SURIGAO STRAIT

Aware of the approaching danger from the Japanese Southern Force, the 7th Fleet Support Force, under the command of Rear Admiral Jesse Oldendorf, was ready and waiting. He had a powerful collection of warships with which to defend the Leyte landings, including six battleships (all but one of which had been damaged or sunk at Pearl Harbor but brought back into service), four heavy and four light cruisers, twenty-eight destroyers and thirty-nine motor torpedo boats. Vice Admiral Nishimura had just two battleships, three heavy and one light cruisers, and eleven destroyers.



Men on the flight deck of the escort carrier USS *Kalinin Bay* watch as clouds of smoke rises from the USS *St. Lo* after the latter, another US carrier, was hit by a kamikaze off Samar on October 25, 1944. (USNHHC)

The first sighting of the Japanese force was made by a patrol boat at 22.15 hours on the 24th. Alerted, the MTBs rushed into the attack, firing thirty-four torpedoes at the Japanese ships. The next to attack, in the early hours of 25 October, was Captain Jesse Coward's Destroyer Squadron 54. Coward himself led a division of three on the east side of the strait while his other two ships moved in from the west. Attacking on both flanks of Nishimura's column, the torpedoes found inviting targets.

An officer on the Japanese cruiser *Mogami*, steaming in formation behind the battleships *Yamashiro* and *Fusō*, described the result of the destroyer's attack: "Direct torpedo hit [observed] on starboard side of *Fusō* amidships, causing ship to list to starboard and lose speed. *Fusō* fell back, and *Mogami* moved on behind *Yamashiro*. Thereafter, several torpedo attacks received, interspersed with intermittent and accurate enemy shellfire."[4] *Fusō* broke up, or exploded, and sank.

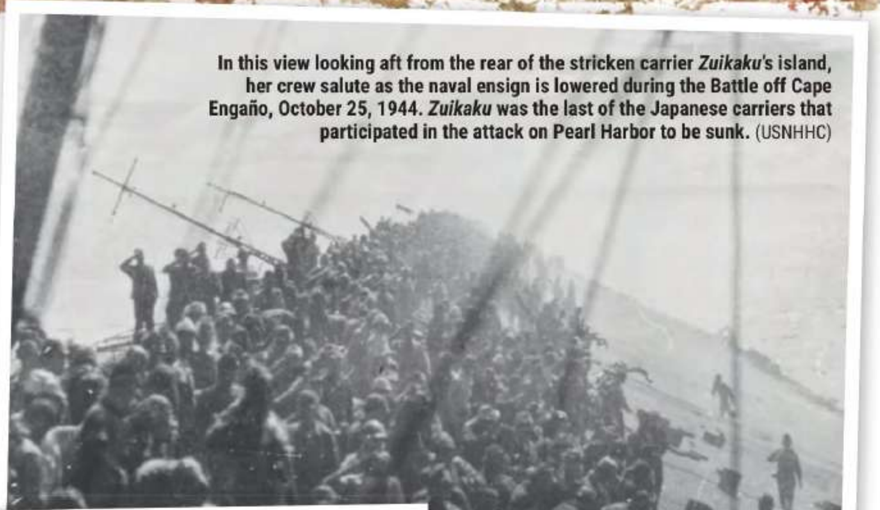
Nishimura then ran into even more trouble, as *Yamashiro* was also hit by a torpedo, reducing her speed to 5 knots. As she struggled on towards Leyte Gulf, *Yamashiro* reached the narrows where Oldendorf had assembled his battleships. Behind a screen of cruisers, which included the Royal Australian Navy's HMAS *Shropshire*, the six battleships of his force trained their guns toward the approaching enemy.

Before the war, both the US and Japan had expected the big-gun battleships to dominate the war in the Pacific. But the emergence of the aircraft carrier and naval air power had largely relegated the battleships to the role of escorts. Now, for the first time during the war, they were finally involved in just the sort of battle they had been built for.

Oldendorf's cruisers engaged the enemy at 03.51 hours; his battleships' 16-inch guns roared to life two minutes later. Captain Smoot of Destroyer Squadron 56 watched the massive broadside from the American battleships: "The devastating accuracy of this gunfire was the most beautiful sight I have ever witnessed. The arched line of tracers in the darkness looked like a continual stream of lighted railroad cars going over a hill. No target could be observed at first, then shortly there would be fires and explosions, and another enemy ship would be accounted for."[5] »

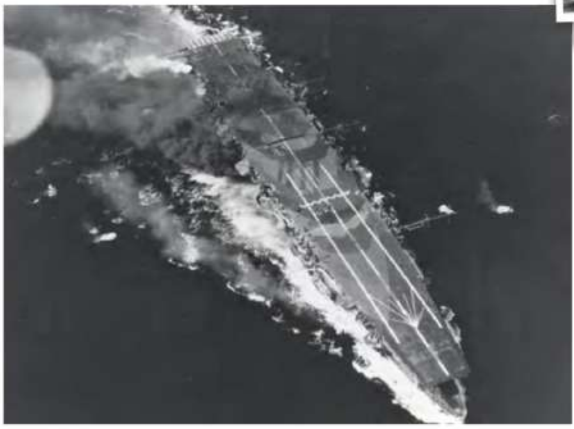
BELOW: **The battleship USS *West Virginia* lights up the sky whilst firing during the Battle of Surigao Strait on the night of October 24/25, 1944.** (USNHHC)

BOTTOM: **Native and US military craft pictured searching for Japanese survivors during rescue operations in Surigao Strait, October 1944.**



In this view looking aft from the rear of the stricken carrier *Zuikaku*'s island, her crew salute as the naval ensign is lowered during the Battle off Cape Engaño, October 25, 1944. *Zuikaku* was the last of the Japanese carriers that participated in the attack on Pearl Harbor to be sunk. (USNHHC)

BELOW RIGHT: **American survivors of the Battle off Samur being rescued on October 26, 1944. Some 1,200 crewmen from USS *Gambier Bay*, USS *Hoel*, USS *Johnston* and USS *Samuel B.* Roberts were rescued during the days following the action.** (National Museum of the US Navy)



BELOW: **The Japanese aircraft carrier *Zuihō* still underway after several hits by aircraft from Task Force 38 during the battle off Cape Engaño, October 25, 1944 – as pictured by the crew of a plane operating from USS *Enterprise*. Note the carrier's flight deck camouflage on the flight deck, which has been buckled amidships.** (NARA)

BOTTOM: **Photographed from an aircraft operating from USS *Franklin*, this is *Zuihō* sinking during the Battle off Cape Engaño.** (USNHHC)

The duel of the battleships lasted just ten minutes, with USS *Mississippi* firing the last salvo. This was the last salvo ever fired by a battleship against another battleship in history. Shells smashed into *Yamashiro* and *Mogami*. A torpedo from the USS *Bennion* finished off *Yamashiro*.

The rear column of the Southern Force, commanded by Vice Admiral Shima, appeared in the Strait, with the light cruiser *Abukuma* being hit by a torpedo fired from a motor torpedo boat. Seeing the remnants of Nishimura's force withdrawing, Shima also turned around, but in the ensuing confusion his flagship *Nachi* collided with *Mogami*. Both were badly damaged. *Mogami* was later abandoned before being sunk after she was shelled by the advancing US cruisers and struck by naval torpedo-bombers. Only one of Nishimura's seven ships escaped, and the threat from the Southern Force was eliminated.

BATTLE OFF SAMAR

With the 7th Fleet Support Force engaging the Japanese Southern Force, and the Third Fleet steaming towards the Japanese Northern Force the San Bernadino Strait, was unguarded. Vice Admiral Takeo Kurita's Centre Force duly passed through it unchallenged. Ahead, however, were the three carrier groups of Kincaid's Seventh Fleet, call-signs *Taffy 1, 2* and *3* respectively, with their destroyer escorts. They stood little chance against Kurita's battleships and cruisers.

It was *Taffy 3* which first sighted the approaching Japanese warships on October 25. Almost immediately, Rear Admiral Clifton Sprague ordered his ships to make smoke while his carriers turned into the wind and launched all planes, regardless of their state of readiness. While they were doing this, the guns of the Japanese ships roared. Sprague later reflected that, "It did not appear any of our ships could survive another five minutes."

But rather than run, the escorting destroyers attacked. The Japanese cruiser *Kumano* was hit and set on fire. The destroyers charged towards the Japanese ships with suicidal bravery. Three of them were sunk, as was the carrier USS *Gambier Bay*. But their attacks, and those from the aircraft of *Taffy 2*, were so relentless, that Kurita, after losing another two cruisers, gave up the struggle and retreated.

Sprague later admitted that he could not believe his eyes when he saw the Japanese ships turn back. Rear Admiral Samuel Eliot Morison later remarked that, "In no engagement in its entire history has the United States Navy shown more gallantry, guts and gumption than in the two morning hours between 0730 and 0930 off Samar."

While these dramatic events were unfolding, Halsey's ships sighted Ozawa's Northern Force. They struck the Japanese in what is known as the Battle off Cape Engaño, the last of the Battle of Leyte Gulf's engagements. In this encounter, the US ships and aircraft sank the carrier *Zuikaku*, the light carriers *Chitose* and *Zuihō*, and the destroyer *Akizuki*, all with heavy loss of life.

LARGEST NAVAL BATTLE IN HISTORY

In terms of total tonnage of the ships involved and the wide area covered by the different engagements, the Battle of Leyte Gulf is regarded as the largest naval battle in history. Altogether around 300 US ships were involved, facing almost seventy Japanese – between them totalling over 200,000 naval personnel.

With the loss of ten cruisers, four carriers and three battleships, the Imperial Japanese Navy suffered its worst ever defeat and, as an effective offensive force, it ceased to exist. However, if Halsey had blocked the San Bernadino Strait, the destruction of the Japanese would have been complete.

NOTES:

1. Quoted in Thomas J. Cutler, *The Battle of Leyte Gulf 23-26 October 1944* (HarperCollins, New York, 1994), p.60.
2. *United States Strategic Bombing Survey (Pacific), Naval Analysis Division, Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, Vol. II, p.317.
3. The National Archives, ADM 234/365 *The Battle for Leyte Gulf*, p.27.
4. Quoted from www.combinedfleet.com.
5. Roland Smoot, *The Reminiscences of Vice Admiral Roland N. Smoot* (Annapolis, US Naval Institute Press, 1972), p.139.

THE BATTLE OF BURMA

The US Navy had swept all before it, with victory after victory. Now it was the turn of the British Army.

The mounting losses suffered by the Japanese to their shipping, as well as the naval forces that were supposed to provide the protection, was beginning to tell on the Japanese armies across the Pacific. Unless they could achieve a monumental breakthrough somewhere to change the course of the war in the East, their garrisons, strung out across the Pacific, faced strangulation. The only place where they believed such a major success was possible was Burma.

After being driven out of Burma in 1942, the British had reorganised their forces in the region, creating the Fourteenth Army commanded by General 'Bill' Slim and had begun to undertake offensives into Burma, including those undertaken by the Chindits. But the British base in India was far from secure, with the 'Quit India' movement agitating for the end of British rule. Mutinies, mass strikes and huge demonstrations disrupted the British in their plans to re-take Burma, with British troops tied down in policing duties.

The Japanese believed that if the British forces in the region could be beaten, the Indians would rise up and drive out their imperial overlords. The consequence of this would be that China would be completely isolated, its troops no longer able to receive the military assistance from the Allies that had kept the armies under Chiang Kai-shek fighting, and the Chinese would be driven to the negotiating table.

The Japanese armies released from Burma and China could then be re-deployed in defence of the outer Japanese islands plus the vast resources of India, Burma and China would fall into Japanese hands. Japan's position in the region would be improved immeasurably and the prospect of an Allied victory pushed into the very far distance. The fighting in Burma was considered a 'forgotten' war but in the spring of 1944, it held centre stage in the great global conflict. »

BELOW: **A Fourteenth Army patrol moves forward towards Japanese positions during the fighting in Burma.** (Historic Military Press)

RIGHT: **Lieutenant General Mutaguchi Renya, commander of the Japanese Fifteenth Army.**

FAR RIGHT: **The badge of the Fourteenth Army. Formed in eastern India in 1943, with Slim in command, Fourteenth, or XIV, Army came to be known as the "Forgotten Army". This was summed up by the following statement attributed to Slim: "When you go home don't worry about what to tell your loved ones and friends about service in Asia. No one will know where you were, or where it is if you do. You are, and will remain, The Forgotten Army." By 1945, the XIV Army had reputedly become the largest single Army of the war. Slim himself designed the XIV Army's formation sign.** (James Luto Collection)

BELOW: **The scene of devastation at Naga Village near Kohima. This picture was taken after the fighting in the area in 1944.** (James Luto Collection)

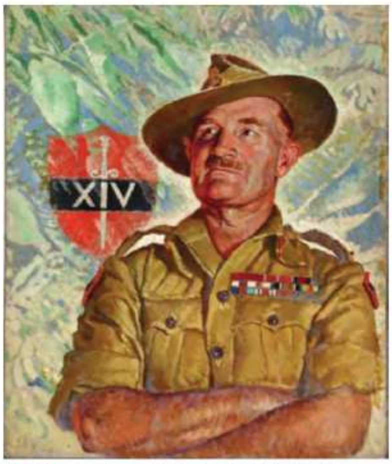
OPERATION U-GO

It was against the Fourteenth Army on the Assam-Burma border that the main Japanese attack would be delivered. But Slim's strength had been increased, mainly with Indian divisions, despite the Indian independence movement, and he also planned to take the offensive by driving into Burma. The invasion of Burma would have to be overland through very difficult country which would pose very considerable problems of supply. Slim, consequently, wanted to improve his chances of success by wearing down the enemy in small-scale operations before the main attack was delivered.

These minor operations were undertaken by 4 Corps, which, under the command of Lieutenant General Geoffrey Scoones, was composed of three Indian divisions. At the beginning of 1944, 4 Corps began gradually pushing deeper into northern Burma to dominate the wide region of hills from the Kabaw Valley to the Chin Hills some 150 miles south of the Indian city of Imphal, which is itself less than fifty miles from the Burmese border.

Behind this front, spread widely across the Imphal plain, the Fourteenth Army had established makeshift camps for the troops, hutted hospitals, supply dumps, ordnance depots and engineer parks connected by wide tarmac roads which ran through Kohima to a railhead hacked out of the jungle at Dimapur to the north of Imphal. All this had been accomplished with the efforts of some 60,000 or more Indian labourers. It was from these bases that the Fourteenth Army would begin its drive towards Rangoon.

Impressive though this all sounds, these encampments had been sited where the ground was most suitable, or the easiest, for building work to be undertaken, without consideration being given to how these dispersed places could be defended. Yet the Fourteenth Army was on the offensive and as long as it was on the front foot, defensive considerations were considered relatively unimportant. However, Lieutenant General Mutaguchi Renya, commander of the Japanese Fifteenth Army, believed he could sweep the British out of Burma, indeed out of India. In Operation *U-Go*, Lieutenant General Mutaguchi planned to encircle Imphal with one division attacking from the south, one from the east and one from the west. A fourth division would then complete the isolation of Imphal by taking Kohima and Dimapur. Mutaguchi was under no illusion of the importance of the fighting to come, informing his officers, "On this one battle rests the fate of the Empire."[1]



ABOVE: **Lieutenant-General Sir William 'Bill' Slim, with the insignia of the Fourteenth Army behind him, in a portrait that was created at the instigation of the Ministry of Information during the Second World War.** (National Archives)

"On this one battle rests the fate of the Empire."

ABOVE: **Evacuating a wounded soldier of the 2nd Battalion, The Dorsetshire Regiment from Garrison Hill during the Battle of Kohima.** (Courtesy of the Devon and Dorset Regimental Museum)

Throughout January and February 1944, fighting patrols into enemy-held territory by 4 Corps had noticed a build-up of Japanese strength and from captured documents a picture of the enemy's intentions was pieced together. Slim was presented with three possible ways to counter the anticipated Japanese attack. The first was to pre-empt the enemy's move by launching his own attack first. The second was to hold the line of the Chindwin and defeat the Japanese as they tried to cross the river, whilst the third option was to draw the Japanese onto Imphal where 4th Corps would be waiting in prepared defensive positions and then crush the enemy on the battlefield of Slim's own choosing. The third option was the one that, in Slim's eyes, offered the best chance of destroying the Japanese. It was, therefore, the one he decided on.

CENTRE LEFT: **As the last Hurricane ever built, PZ865 rolled of the production lines in July 1944, too late to see service at Kohima or Imphal. That said, it is seen here having been painted to represent the Hurricane Mk.IIC HW840 that, coded EG-S, was flown by 34 Squadron's Flight Lieutenant Jimmy Whalen DFC. Having undertaken 176 sorties, Whalen, a Canadian pilot, was killed on April 18, 1944, during the fighting at Kohima and Imphal.** (Courtesy of Alan Wilson)

For his battle at Imphal, Slim asked his area commander, General George Giffard, for reinforcements, which he provided by sending in the Indian Parachute Brigade, as well as the British 2nd Division if urgently required. Slim also transported the British 5th Division from the Arakan region of Burma, its place being taken by another Indian division supplied by Giffard.

Slim also needed to time his withdrawal at exactly the right moment. He might, for instance, have entirely misjudged Mutaguchi's intentions and if he withdrew before the start of any Japanese attack, he would give up hard-won territory for no reason. On the other hand, if he waited until the Japanese launched their assault, one or both of his forward divisions – the 17th and 20th – might be overwhelmed before they could withdraw.

Slim calculated that the Japanese offensive would begin on, or close to, March 15. Mutaguchi, as it turned out, struck a week early, launching Operation *U-Go* on March 6, 1944.

A BALL OF FIRE

Having first attacked the 17th Division's forward posts, in the usual Japanese fashion Mutaguchi's men held the British frontally while sending a column round the rear of Major General Cowan's troops in a bid to cut the division off from Imphal. Cowan had to retreat rapidly, the whole division marching on foot through the jungle-clad hills to reach the Imphal Plain.

The next move was by the Japanese 15th Division which crossed the Chindwin on the night of March 15/16, with orders to "advance through the hills like a ball of fire". At the same time, the Japanese 31st Division also crossed the river aiming northwards towards Kohima having been instructed to "annihilate the British on that front".[2]

As the 17th Division withdrew, Cowan found the enemy blocking the road to Imphal at Milestone 109. Sending infantry detachments along the high ridges on either side of the blockade, in a series of hard-fought small actions they cleared the Japanese from the crests. This was followed by a direct assault upon the enemy blockade, an attack that was closely supported by RAF aircraft, in which the 17th Division broke through, reaching the Imphal Plain with the assistance of the 23rd Division on April 5.

The Indian 20th Division also had to conduct a fighting withdrawal. To avoid being cut off, it retreated to the Shenam Saddle in the hills surrounding the Imphal Plain.

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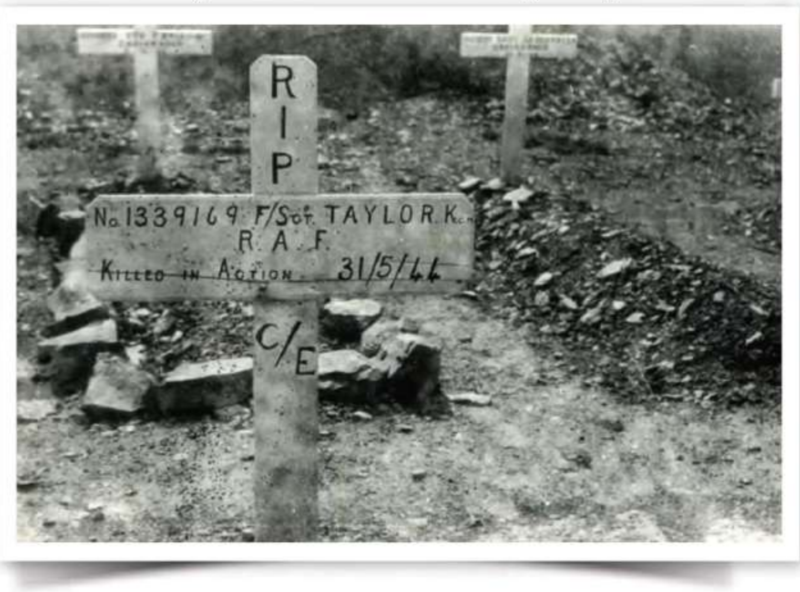
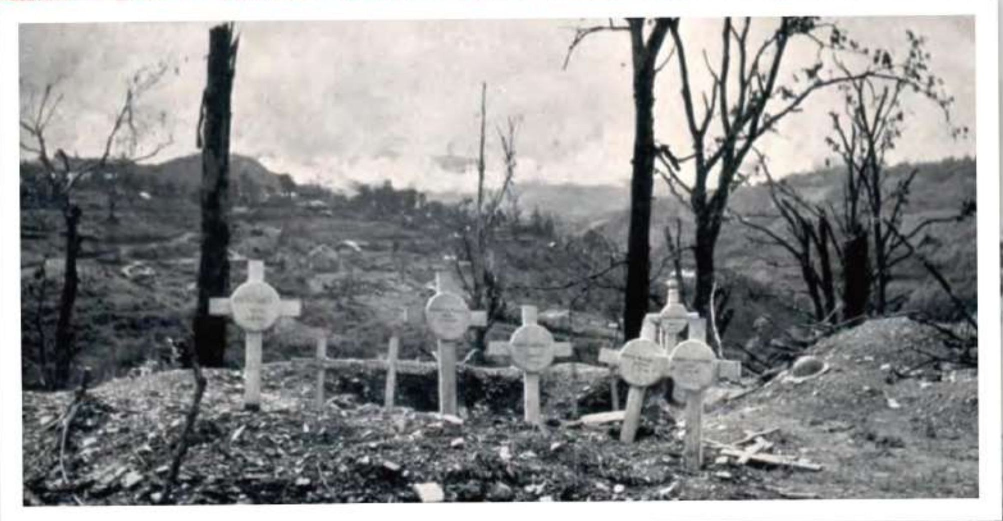


LEFT: **The original wooden marker that was placed on the grave of Flight Sergeant Kenneth Taylor in Kohima War Cemetery. Serving in the Hurricane-equipped 60 Squadron, Taylor was killed in action whilst attacking Japanese positions near Kohima on May 31, 1944.** (Historic Military Press)



ABOVE: **The graves of some of the men of the 2nd Battalion, The Dorsetshire Regiment killed during the Battle of Kohima. The exact location of these grave markers is just below the District Commissioner's bungalow next to the Company H.Q. trench. In the middle distance is Treasury Hill.** (Courtesy of the Devon and Dorset Regimental Museum)

Scoones had prepared for the Japanese attack by concentrating his administrative and headquarters staff into fortified areas across the Imphal Plain, each responsible for its own defence with tanks strategically placed to give support. The two main strongpoints, the airfields at Imphal and Palel, were powerfully garrisoned also by administration troops. This gave the fighting formations of 4 Corps complete freedom of movement without having to worry about protecting the normally highly vulnerable rear areas. Those fighting formations were reinforced by the 5th Indian Division at the end of March.

All was now ready for the great battle at Imphal. But Slim was concerned about the Japanese forces that were bearing down on Kohima and Dimapur. If these places fell to the enemy, Imphal would be surrounded just as Mutaguchi had planned. Slim had to decide which of these to concentrate his strength on, for he could not hold both. He chose the former, with Kohima Ridge offering the better defensive positions. Slim made no bones about Kohima – it had to be held to the last.

THE BATTLE OF KOHIMA

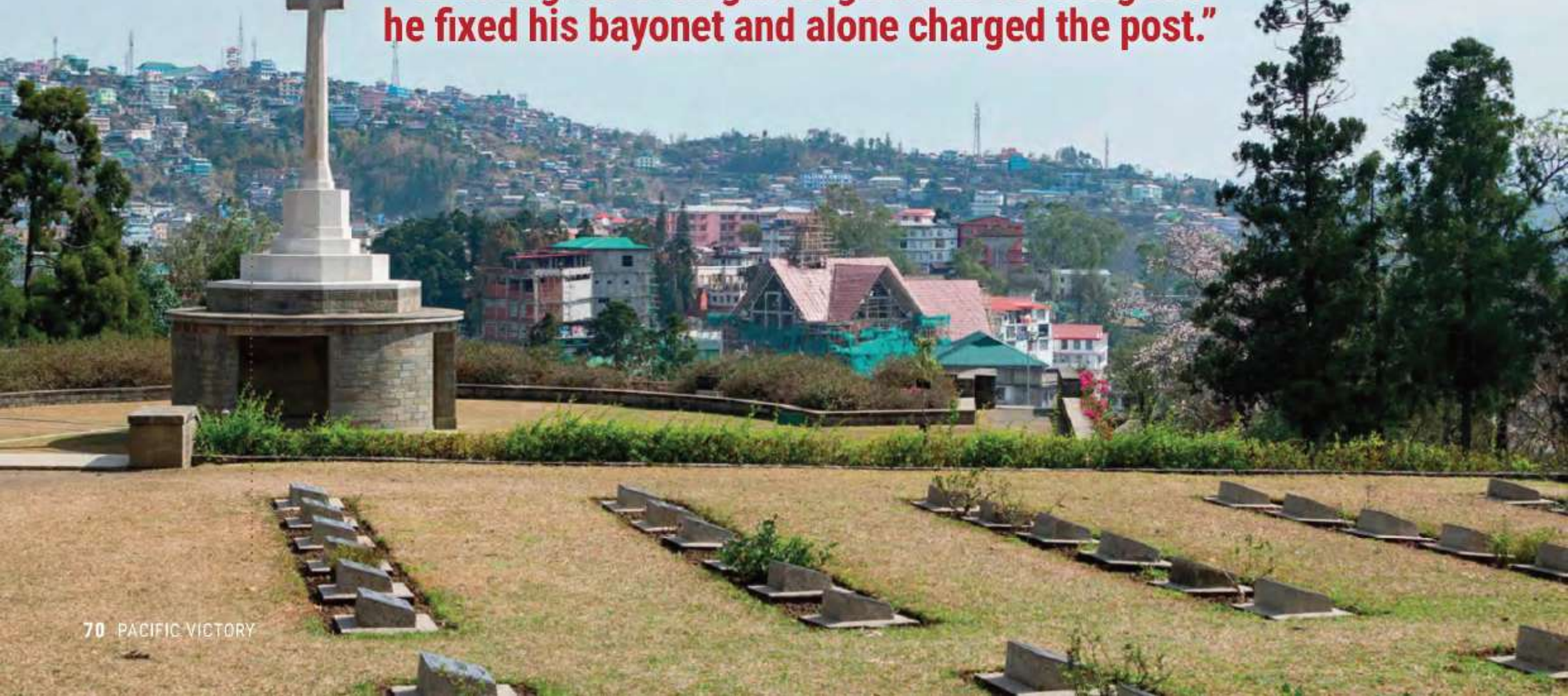
Slim's greatest fear, as he awaited the Japanese assault upon Kohima, was that the enemy would merely mask Kohima and rush up to Dimapur and cut off the Fourteenth Army's communications with India. Fortunately for the British, Major General Sato, with the 31st Division, had been ordered to take Kohima, and that was all he intended to do.

The 161st Indian Brigade conducted a fighting withdrawal as it pulled back to Kohima under relentless pressure from Sato's division. The Indians managed to delay the Japanese long enough for them to be able to take up defensive positions in a series of trenches along Kohima Ridge, where they were joined by the 4th Battalion Royal West Kent Regiment. It was a meagre force to face the 12,000 men of the Japanese 31st Division which launched its first attack on April 6.

Such was the weight of the attack, the Indian troops were forced to withdraw from two positions on the southern perimeter. Under the cover of darkness on the night of April 7/8, the Japanese established a machine-gun post within 50 yards of a section of the West Kents that was commanded by Lance Corporal John Pennington Harman. This was a severe threat to his men but, because of the nature of the ground, his section was not able to fire directly at the enemy post. So, Harman decided to take matters into his own hands: "Without hesitation he went forward by himself and using a four second grenade which he held on to for at least two seconds after releasing the lever in order to get immediate effect, threw it into the post and followed up immediately. He annihilated the post and returned to his section with the machine-gun.

"Early the following morning he recovered a position on a forward slope 150 yards from the enemy in

> "Ordering his Bren gun to give him covering fire he fixed his bayonet and alone charged the post."



BELOW: **Much of the area around the District Commissioner's bungalow and tennis court at Kohima was subsequently used as the grounds for the Kohima War Cemetery.** (Shutterstock)

TOP MIDDLE: Gurkhas advancing with Lee or Grant tanks to clear the Japanese from the Imphal-Kohima road. (Library of Congress)

ABOVE RIGHT: Royal Artillery gunners firing on Japanese positions on the Imphal Plain whilst supporting the operations of the 17th Indian Division. (Historic Military Press)

order to strengthen a platoon which had been heavily attacked during the night. On occupying his position, he discovered a party of enemy digging in under cover of machine-gun fire and snipers. Ordering his Bren gun to give him covering fire he fixed his bayonet and alone charged the post shooting four and bayoneting one thereby wiping out the post." For his actions Lance Corporal Harman was awarded the Victoria Cross. Sadly, the award was posthumous as Harman was severely wounded by a burst of enemy machine-gun fire on his way back and died soon after reaching British lines.[3]

Though the tiny garrison was surrounded and hanging on by a thread, the Allied control of the air meant that supplies could be dropped to them and Mountbatten, the Supreme Commander for South-East Asia, ordered the Troop Carrier Command to divert a number of its Douglas Dakota and Curtiss C-46 Commando aircraft to flying supplies into Kohima. This was a very tricky business, the pilots having to drop their cargoes from low-level with pin-point accuracy.

In the evenings, the Japanese hailed the defenders in perfect English through a megaphone: "You are surrounded! Surrender or you will be annihilated." They also called out in Urdu to the Indians promising them that they would be treated well if they surrendered. No one believed them.

The men were driven slowly backwards until they occupied an area just 1,000 yards by 1,000 yards centred on Garrison Hill, then a long, wooded spur on a high ridge west of Kohima village. The fiercest hand-to-hand combats there took place in the garden of the District Commissioner's bungalow and around the adjacent tennis court.

Major Frankie Boshell, who commanded 'B' Company, 1st Royal Berkshires, provided a graphic insight into the fighting in this part of Kohima: "To begin with I took over an area overlooking the Tennis Court... The lie of the land made impossible to move by day because of Japanese snipers. We were in Kohima for three weeks. We were attacked every single night... They came in waves; it was like a pigeon shoot. Most nights they overran part of the battalion position, so we had to mount counter-attacks... Water was short and restricted to about one pint per man per day. So we stopped shaving. Air supply was the key, but the steep terrain and narrow ridges meant that some of the drops went to the Japs. My company went into Kohima over 100 strong and came out at about sixty."

Help for the beleaguered troops came in the form of the British 2nd Division, which drove down the road from Dimapur and broke through the Japanese lines. Such was the sight which greeted the men of the 2nd Division on their arrival at Kohima, that one regimental account recalls how, "The Kohima Ridge was just like a scene from the battlefields of 1914-18. Trees had been blasted down to stumps by continuous shelling, native buildings blown to pieces and the whole area covered with shell holes filled with muddy water."[4]

Lieutenant Colonel Wilbur Bickford, the commanding officer of the 1st Battalion Royal Berkshire Regiment, also recalled the relief of the garrison: "I was profoundly shocked by the conditions which prevailed on Garrison Hill. The troops looked hollow-eyed, dirty and had beards. The stench of festering corpses, Japanese, British and Indian, was overpowering. There were no sanitary arrangements »

CENTRE LEFT: Dedicated in 1987, this memorial commemorates those who died in the Battle of Kohima. It is located in the Dean's Garden at York Minster. The plaque in the background carries the Kohima epitaph: "When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today." (Courtesy of Dave Morton)

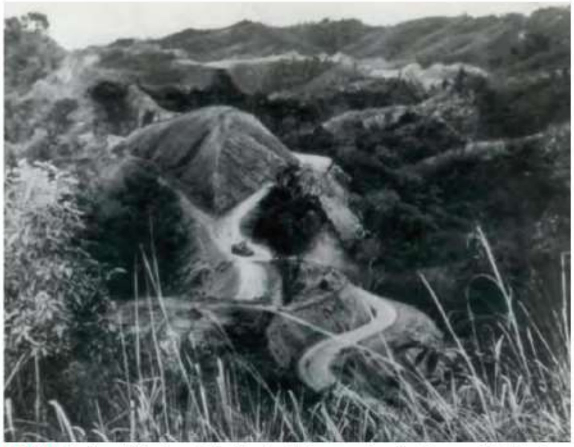
LEFT: Two British officers and a Sikh signaller in action near Imphal, between March and July 1944. (Library of Congress)

ABOVE & RIGHT: Jemadar Rao Abdul Hafiz Khan's name is one of those that appears on the Commonwealth Gates, a memorial located at the Hyde Park Corner end of Constitution Hill in London. There are twenty-three VC recipients from the First World War, and twelve George Cross and thirty-nine Victoria Cross recipients from the Second World War listed. (Historic Military Press)

and stores of all descriptions were lying about. It was possible to pick up anything from a Tommy gun to a pair of ladies' shoes, and the place was a veritable paradise for flies."[5]

Garrison Hill was the scene of perhaps the most bitter fighting of the entire Burma Campaign. The fighting around the District Commissioner's bungalow marked the furthest advance of the Japanese Army into India.

Such sights aside, it was time to turn the tables on the enemy. The 2nd Division assaulted the ridges in which the Japanese had dug bunkers and trenches. Fighting was hard, and eventually tanks were brought up to blast the enemy from their foxholes. More reinforcements arrived when the 7th Indian Division was flown in from the Arakan and by mid-May most of the area around Kohima had been cleared.

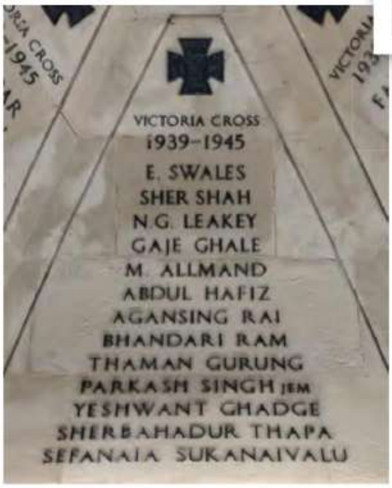


ABOVE: A view of the terrain in the Imphal area, showing the road that led from the town into Burma. Note the Allied tank that can be seen approaching one of the bends. The image is dated May 5, 1944. (Historic Military Press)

ABOVE: As the fighting in Burma continues, troops of the 19th Indian Division are seen here firing 3-inch mortars in support of the advance along the Mawchi Road, east of Toungoo, between March and July 1944. (James Luto Collection)

IMPHAL

The fighting for Imphal was on a far greater scale that Kohima, but Slim had prepared for this battle, and reinforcements were flown in with two brigades of the 5th Indian Division and later a brigade of the 7th Indian Division joining the 17th, 20th and 23rd divisions. The Japanese attacked Imphal with their usual speed and confidence but, when they descended from the cover of the jungles on the hillsides into the Imphal Plain, they were met with intense barrages from artillery, machine-guns and rifles from the prepared fortified areas, as well as being repeatedly strafed from the air.



Their attack was brought to a halt, and they could do nothing other than attempt to besiege Imphal. Just as at Kohima, the RAF played a key role in keeping the Anglo-Indian divisions supplied as they withstood the Japanese attacks. During the siege, the RAF delivered 14,000,000 pounds of rations, 1,000,000 gallons of petrol, 43,000,000 cigarettes and 1,200 bags of mail. On the return journey to their bases, RAF aircraft took out 13,000 wounded and 43,000 non-combatants. They also flew in 12,000 reinforcements.

The Japanese continued to attack from every angle for week after week in the hills surrounding the plain, but their supply situation was dire, and the troops' health and strength began to suffer. Though they made a few temporary advances, the Japanese were unable to hold onto any significant gains.

Throughout April, men from Yamamoto Force, which, commanded by Major-General Yamamoto, was formed from units detached from the Japanese 15th and 33rd divisions, battered almost constantly at the positions held by the 20th Division in a bid to break into the Imphal Plain. This included an attack upon the Silchar Track, which the British had christened Hampton Hill. There the 1st Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment and the 8th Gurkhas guarded this vital passage into the plain below and it was there that these two battalions were assaulted at night by a large force of the enemy. One company of the Northamptons and the Gurkhas fought off the Japanese with the help of tanks which had climbed 2,000 feet up a twisting corkscrew track, the last part of which was hewn out of solid bamboo jungle by sappers.

The sheer ferocity of the fighting around Imphal can be seen in the actions of Jemadar Rao Abdul Hafiz Khan of the 9th Jat Regiment. On April 6 he was ordered to take his platoon up a steep hill – which later came to be known as Runaway Hill – and attack a Japanese position which dominated the area and from where the Japanese had launched several patrols that had claimed a number of lives.

Halfway up the hill, his men came under heavy fire but Khan did not hesitate: "On reaching the crest, Jemadar Rao Abdul Hafiz Khan was wounded in the leg, but seeing a machine-gun firing from a flank, which had already caused several casualties, he immediately went towards it and seizing the barrel pushed it upwards, whilst another man killed the gunner. Jemadar Rao Abdul Hafiz Khan then took a Bren gun from a wounded man and advanced against the enemy, firing as he advanced, and killing several of the enemy. So fierce was the attack, and all his men so inspired by the determination of Jemadar Rao Abdul Hafiz Khan to kill all enemy in sight at whatever cost, that the enemy, who

MIDDLE LEFT: Allied shells burst on Japanese positions on the Tamu Road, in the Imphal area, during the fighting for possession of this vital supply road, May 18, 1944. (Historic Military Press)

LEFT: The crew of a 40mm Bofors anti-aircraft gun of the 11th East African Division watch as an RAF Dakota drops supplies on the western side of the Chindwin River, 8-11 December 1944. (James Luto Collection)

BELOW: A view of Imphal War Cemetery. There were originally some 950 burials in the cemetery, but after hostilities had ceased, the Army Graves Service brought in graves from two smaller cemeteries in Imphal and from isolated positions in the surrounding region. The cemetery now contains 1,600 Commonwealth burials of the Second World War. (Zonel Sougaijam/ Shutterstock)

were still in considerable numbers on the position, ran away down the opposite slope of the hill. Regardless of machine-gun fire which was now being fired at him from another feature a few hundred yards away, he pursued the enemy, firing at them as they retired." As he was pursuing the Japanese, Khan was hit in the chest by machine-gun fire and died shortly afterwards.[6]

The conditions that the British and Indian divisions faced at Imphal is evidenced by this description relating to the 20th: "It was on this strange battlefield, where deployment was difficult, if not impossible, where the single road axis could be commanded with ease by guns and infantry, and where war was to consist of entrenched garrisons with perimeters heavily wired and mined holding grimly to peak tops in the face of shelling and suicidal attack, that the 20th Division was to make its stand."[7]

Stand they did, as did the rest of the Fourteenth Army. By May, after suffering horrendous casualties and its malnourished troops too weak and crippled to fight on, the Japanese offensive was clearly reaching its catastrophic conclusion – and the divisions of the Fourteenth Army were poised to turn defence into attack. The monsoon, though, had broken, and the Anglo-Indian advance was severely hampered. But the Japanese were in no condition to resist, with the troops being forced to scatter in search of food. Despite this, and though the siege of Imphal ended on June 22, when the Kohima-Imphal road was reopened, it was not until July 3 that the Japanese Imperial command formally called off its offensive.

"ONE OF THE GREATEST BATTLES IN HISTORY"

In the failed offensive against Imphal and Kohima, the Imperial Japanese Army suffered its heaviest defeat of the war up to that time. Total casualties amounted to just short of 55,000 with most of these losses being the result of starvation and disease. They also lost all their pack animals and tens of thousands of cattle, which severely hampered their subsequent operations. By comparison, the Anglo-Indian and African troops of the Fourteenth Army had lost 17,000 men either killed or wounded.

Lord Mountbatten later described the Allied victory of Imphal and Kohima as, "probably one of the greatest battles in history". It was there, notes a memorial on the Kohima battlefield that "the Japanese invasion of India was halted".

There was, though, no immediate possibility of Slim being able to pursue the broken enemy forces because of the monsoons. All he could do was prepare for the dry weather, when he could launch his offensive to retake Rangoon and drive the Japanese out of Burma.

NOTES:

1. *Manipur Operations 1944* (Military Intelligence Directorate, India, 1946), p.14.
2. Field Marshal Viscount Slim, *Defeat into Victory* (Pan, London, 1999), pp.298-9.
3. Supplement to *The London Gazette*, June 20, 1944. p.2961.
4. Quoted from www.queensroyalsurreys.org.uk.
5. Quoted in Leslie Edwards, *Kohima, The Furthest Battle* (History Press, Stroud, 2009), p.199.
6. Supplement to *The London Gazette*, July 20, 1944, pp.3501–2.
7. James Luto, *Fighting With The Fourteenth Army* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2013), p.84.

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As with every campaign in Burma, the terrain itself plays a major role in determining strategy, with the predominant feature being the monsoons. These heavy rains, which fall between May and October, make the native tracks on the soft, slippery shale of the hillsides almost impassable. Rivers and streams become major obstacles which have to be bridged and the health of the men, drenched to the skin day after day, suffers terribly. After the monsoons have subsided, there is a brief spell when the tracks dry out and the streams shrink, that campaigning with a large, modern army becomes possible. It was after the monsoon of 1944, therefore, that General Slim intended to launch his offensive to recapture the Burmese capital, Rangoon, in a race against time and nature.

Slim benefitted from one great advantage in that the Allied air forces completely dominated the skies which meant that the Fourteenth Army would not be entirely dependent on long lines of supply as it drove southwards, but could, at least in part, be supplied by air. Even so, his troops would have to cross two major rivers, the Chindwin and the Irrawaddy. The first of these was crossed in late autumn 1944, as a preliminary objective, with three bridgeheads being established. When the main operation was due to start, the Fourteenth Army would break out from the bridgeheads into the Shwebo Plain, which was a dry, open expanse of land where the Allied armour would no longer be confined to narrow jungle tracks and could be fully utilised for the first time.

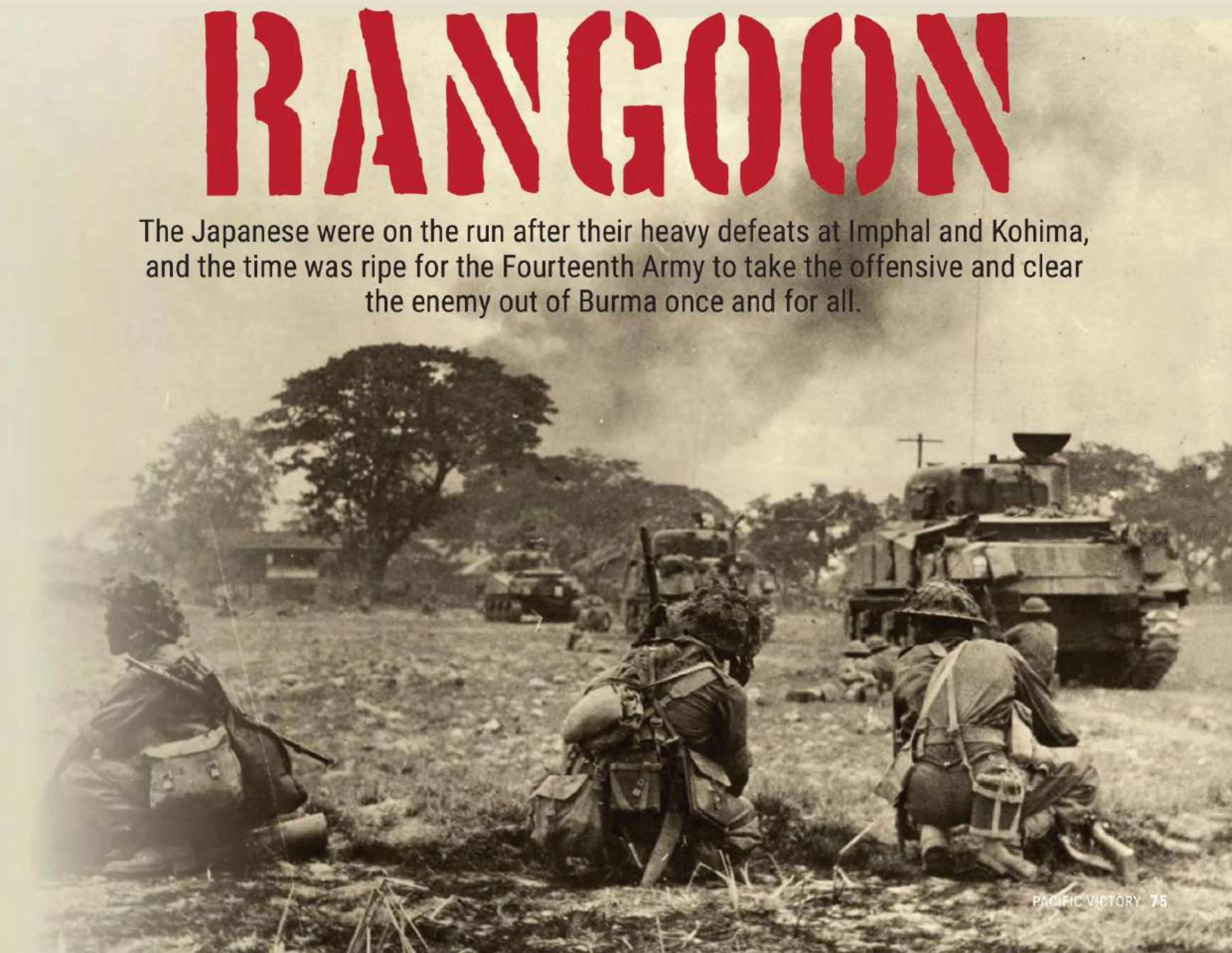
If the Japanese could be brought to battle in such country, they were certain to be at a grave disadvantage. General Kimura Heitaro knew this as well as Slim, and when the Fourteenth Army began its great offensive on December 3, 1944, breaking out of its bridgeheads over the Chindwin, Kimura gave ground, deploying only light forces to delay the Anglo-Indian divisions. He concentrated his main strength instead behind the Irrawaddy and challenged the Fourteenth Army to dare to cross it.

The scheme adopted by Slim, Plan 'Y', was to see 33 Corps, with the 19th Division attached, force its way across the Irrawaddy north and west of Mandalay. This, it was expected, would draw Kimura's divisions into that area. While the battle was raging round Mandalay, 4 Corps would advance further south to appear at Pakokku, almost 100 miles downstream, and storm across the Irrawaddy. Once over the »

BELOW: **Indian Army tanks and infantry going into an attack as a village blazes and Japanese snipers target the advancing troops during the final push on Rangoon, May 2, 1945.** (James Luto Collection)

THE RACE TO RANGOON

The Japanese were on the run after their heavy defeats at Imphal and Kohima, and the time was ripe for the Fourteenth Army to take the offensive and clear the enemy out of Burma once and for all.



ABOVE: Advancing along the Irrawaddy basin road towards Sogaing and Mandalay, troops of the Fourteenth Army captured the Burmese village of Ywathitgyi in face of fanatical Japanese opposition. Supporting the infantry, a Universal Carrier "crashes through the devastated outskirts of the village", March 1945. (Historic Military Press)

river, 4 Corps, with the help of airborne forces, would rush eastwards to capture Meiktila, the main administrative centre of the Japanese Fifteenth and Thirty-Third armies.

ACROSS THE IRRAWADDY

The Irrawaddy is one of the great rivers of the world. It runs north to south through Burma for 1,348 miles from its Himalayan tributaries to its vast delta on the Andaman Sea. Near Mandalay it is about a mile across. Crossing it with the few boats that could be transported from India would be no easy task.

By January 9, 1945, the 19th Division, leading the northern thrust, reached the Irrawaddy. Though the Japanese put up a stiff fight on the west bank they eventually withdrew across to the east bank where both Slim and Kimura knew the real battle would be fought.

Kimura understood that he could not hold the entire line of the river and so made no attempt to do so, concentrating instead on the most likely crossing points, holding his reserves well back. To disrupt British preparations for crossing the Irrawaddy, the Japanese sent numbers of small suicide squads across the river. These men fought until they were killed, with no intention of returning to their own lines.

The 19th Division also sent patrols across the river each night to scout the ground and to look for the best crossing points. As these met only slight opposition, on January 14 an entire battalion crossed the river and by the 19th the whole of the 98th Brigade was across the Irrawaddy.

The men of 4th Corps, meanwhile, had reached the Irrawaddy and sprung their surprise, with the 20th Division the first to reach the river. It was, though, the 2nd Division, the only all-British division, which had the task of crossing the river opposite the village of Nagazun. There the fast-flowing Irrawaddy is 1,500 yards wide. After a 'thrilling' crossing, the British regiments reached the far bank and drove the Japanese back to Nagazun. This village blocked the road to Mandalay, but, thanks to Allied aircraft and armour, Slim had no intention of his men becoming embroiled in prolonged house-to-house fighting.

"For thirty minutes they plastered the village and seemed to be hitting the targets we had given them," remembered Colonel O G W White of the 2nd Battalion, Dorsetshire Regiment. "It was a grand show to see, and one could feel the battalion's spirit rise… At 13.50 hrs the artillery concentration ceased, and the Battalion went in in magnificent fashion under the really close support of the troops of tanks and [2nd Battalion] the Manchester [Regiment] medium machine guns… It was a most inspiring sight to see two battalions of British infantry advance with bayonets fixed right up under the support of the tanks' 75s and the machine guns."[1]

It took until 15.00 hours before most of Nagazun was in British hands. The last position the Japanese held was in a pagoda at the southern end of the village. There a suicide party hung on until they were all killed the following morning.

BELOW LEFT: A Hawker Hurricane Mark IIc of 28 Squadron RAF flies alongside the Aya bridge, which spans the Irrawaddy River near Mandalay, during a low-level reconnaissance sortie prior to the liberation of the city. (via Historic Military Press)

FAR RIGHT: A Bailey Bridge under construction over the Chindwin River near Kalewa, Burma, less than 12 hours after the town had been captured on December 2, 1944. Following its completion, it is stated that at 1,100 feet, this was the longest such bridge in the world. (Historic Military Press)

MIDDLE LEFT: A 3-inch mortar detachment of the 2nd Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment, during the fighting for Mandalay. (James Luto Collection)

NEAR LEFT: Troops of the 98th Indian Infantry Brigade, part of the 19th Indian Division, advance past burning buildings in a village near Mandalay. (James Luto Collection)

LEFT: A typical British infantryman of the Fourteenth Army. This picture of Private George Maguire, who hailed from London and was serving in the 19th Indian Division, was taken during the capture of the village of Madaya, just north of Mandalay. (James Luto Collection)

The 19th Division had already crossed the Irrawaddy, but its bridgehead had come under ferocious counter-attacks and no progress inland had been possible. The 20th Division crossed the river in support on the night of February 12/13, but it took three days of fighting to enlarge the bridgehead. Not only was the bridgehead attacked frontally, the Japanese also travelled down the river in boats and tried to assail the Allied troops from the rear.

On the night of February 16/17, Jemadar Parkash Singh, of the 13th Frontier Force, was commanding a platoon which found itself facing a powerful Japanese attack. For more than three hours the attackers used flame-throwers, artillery, mortars and medium machine-guns to try and dislodge Parkash's tiny force. His havildar (sergeant) was killed and Parkash himself was wounded. Even so, he continued to direct his men, dragging himself forward on his hands and knees. He was wounded a second time but, collecting the ammunition from his dead comrades, he kept his men in the fight, being injured a third time before finally, and fatally, he was wounded a fourth time by a grenade. He was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross.

By the end of February, a large proportion of the Fourteenth Army was across the Irrawaddy, though fighting continued until the second week of May. The next battle was to be fought at Mandalay and then the race to Rangoon before the monsoons arrived would begin in earnest.

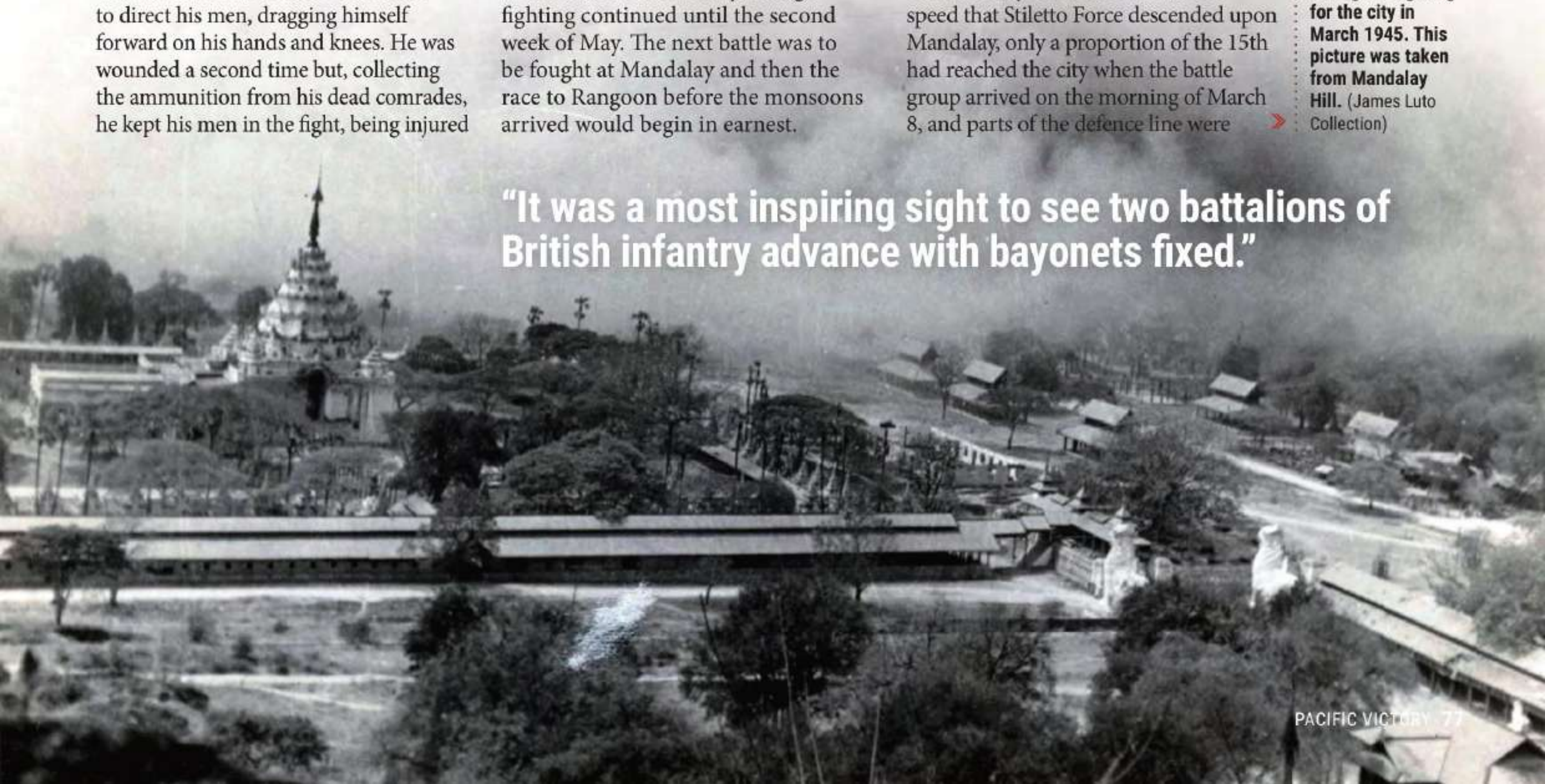
THE ROAD TO MANDALAY

"The crisis of the great battle was at hand," wrote Slim. "Kimura's gaze was fixed on Mandalay and its neighbourhood, his troops faced north and were marching hard to meet us there." What Kimura did not know, was that the troops who were rushing up to Mandalay were heading into a trap. This was because the 4th Corps was shortly to capture the rail and road hub of Meiktila and cut Kimura's communications with Rangoon.

It was the 19th Division which led 33 Corps' drive on Mandalay. Its objective was to seize Mandalay Hill which dominates the city. The advance to the city was led by a small mobile battle group called 'Stiletto Force' drawn from Brigadier Charles Jerrard's 98 Brigade.

The defence of the city had been entrusted to Lieutenant General Yamamoto Seiei's 15th Division which held a line incorporating the Mandalay Canal and Fort Dufferin, with defence in depth being provided by the troops on Mandalay Hill. But such was the speed that Stiletto Force descended upon Mandalay, only a proportion of the 15th had reached the city when the battle group arrived on the morning of March 8, and parts of the defence line were

"It was a most inspiring sight to see two battalions of British infantry advance with bayonets fixed."



BELOW: The Sultan's Palace in Mandalay on fire during the fighting for the city in March 1945. This picture was taken from Mandalay Hill. (James Luto Collection)

RIGHT: In an effort to disrupt Japanese supply lines, on March 19, 1945, a force of 80 heavy bombers flew across the Indian Ocean to attack targets in Thailand. Whilst USAAF B-24s bombed a series of objectives south of Chumphon in the Gulf of Thailand, RAF Liberators attacked the railway sidings at Na Nien. When the crews returned from the mission some of them had been in the air for 17½ hours and had flown 2,500 thousand miles. It is one of the RAF Liberators that is pictured here on its return from Na Nien. (Historic Military Press)

ABOVE: The Union Flag is raised over Fort Dufferin in Mandalay – the last Japanese stronghold in Burma – on March 21, 1945. (James Luto Collection)

unmanned. But the Japanese had taken up their positions on Mandalay Hill.

The hill stands 934 feet high and is studded with monasteries and pagodas. The entire hill was regarded as a shrine, and instructions had been issued to make use of tanks and artillery only if absolutely necessary to avoid damaging any of its sacred sites.

Yamamoto was isolated in Mandalay from the rest of the Japanese forces, and he believed that by trying to defend the city his division would be wiped out. But he was ordered to hold Mandalay to the death.

The rest of 98 Brigade reached Mandalay that same afternoon, with the aim of capturing Mandalay Hill as quickly as possible while the 19th Division's two other brigades moved in from the north-east and the west. The regiment selected to storm the hill was the 4th Battalion, 4th Gurkha Rifles, the entire battalion having been transported by lorry to keep the men as fresh as possible for the assault. That attack began at 17.00 hours.

The Gurkha's first objective was the rifle butts at the base of the hill. This was accomplished at 23.30 hours but, as the steep and tangled terrain proved impassable for mules, only three rifle companies and the HQ company were able to reach this point.

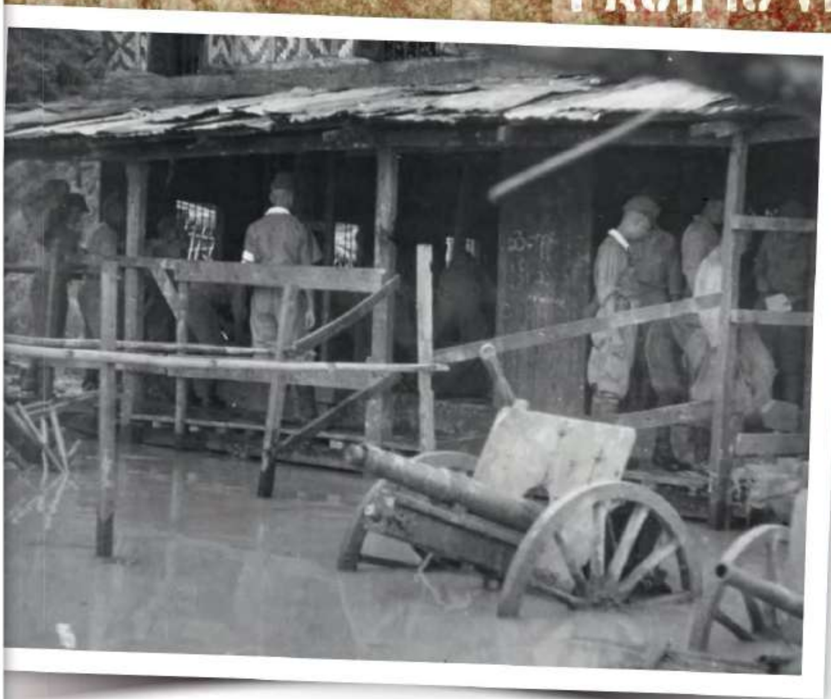
At 01.00 hours, the assault upon the summit went in. "The clearance of the hill was an epic," Major D P R Sterling later remarked. "Fighting had to be confined to the razor-backed top of the hill where the Japanese were under cover in the concrete pagodas protected by iron bars. They had to be burned out with petrol and 'Bee Hive' charges." These charges were used in urban warfare to blow holes in buildings.

At 08.30 hours on March 9, the Gurkhas were relieved by the 2nd Battalion, Royal Berkshire Regiment. One man described fighting the Japanese: "The Jap was a brave man. We only ever took one prisoner. He didn't know what day it was; he was wandering round in a coma… Another we went to pick up, when he saw us coming, he took the pin out of his grenade and blew himself up."[2]

With the Japanese refusing to give themselves up or retreat, extreme measures had to be undertaken to flush the defenders out of their foxholes, as Gunner James Baker of 134 Medium Regiment, Royal Artillery explained: "The infantry could not get the Japs out of the caves, so they drilled holes and poured oil in and set fire to it. Most of the Japs stayed in the caves. Others, in full view of us, jumped from the caves all alight… We had captured the hill but the Japs were still inside."[3]

RIGHT: The drive south to Rangoon. Allied armour is pictured advancing in support of the infantry during the battle for the mid-Burma plains south of Mandalay, March 20, 1945. (Historic Military Press)

CENTRE LEFT: **RAF Liberators, operating from bases in Bengal, attack a bridge on the Burma railway in an effort to disrupt Japanese supply lines in April 1945. This picture shows a bridge close to Kalawthut, some 22 miles south of Moulmein.** (Historic Military Press)



LEFT: **A party of Japanese troops of the 53rd Infantry Division surrendering to the men of the 1/10th Gurkha Rifles at Mokplain village near the Sittang Bend, September 24, 1945. Note the surrendered guns sitting axle-deep in the flood water.** (Courtesy of Chris Turner)

RECAPTURING RANGOON

It was the Royal Berkshire Regiment which was handed the task of taking Mandalay City itself, albeit with the assistance of tanks from the 150th Regiment Royal Armoured Corps. This included the capture of the impressive Fort Dufferin where, behind its 10-foot-thick walls, the Japanese were to make their last stand. Those old walls proved to be surprisingly resilient, and heavy artillery and aerial bombardment had surprisingly little effect. Attempts were even made to 'skip' 2,000lb bombs across the wide moat and into the walls.

There was, though, no hope of relief for the Japanese. When they learned that the British had captured Meiktila, thereby severing communications between Mandalay and Rangoon, Yamamoto was given permission to breakout. During the night of March 19/20, most of the surviving enemy garrison escaped, though many were captured by the British over the course of the following two days. Yamamoto's division lost a total of approximately 6,000 men in the defence of Mandalay and most of its artillery and motorised transport.

With the main Japanese forces cleared from the north of the country, the Fourteenth Army could push on towards Rangoon. There could be no more delay with the onset of the monsoons becoming threateningly nearer with the passing of every day.

It was not the way of the Japanese to retreat and this had proven to be both their strength and their weakness. A tactical withdrawal when circumstances necessitated such a course of action was an anathema to them. This had caused them to defend hopeless positions, such as Mandalay Hill, and they had lost heavily as a result. It was their stubborn courage that was their undoing.

Slim, therefore, expected stiff resistance all the way to Rangoon, and at first this was the case. This prompted Mountbatten to reinstate an earlier idea of mounting an assault directly on Rangoon. On May 1, 1945, Operation *Dracula* was launched with an airborne assault to capture the Japanese gun battery at the estuary of the River Rangoon at Elephant Point. The following day, the 26th Indian Division conducted an amphibious assault upon Rangoon only to discover that the Burmese capital had been abandoned by the enemy. The race to reach Rangoon before the rains arrived had been won.

This was not quite the end of the Burma Campaign and there was yet another disaster to befall what remained of the Japanese forces in the theatre. The Japanese Twenty-Eighth Army, which had been holding out successfully in the Arakan, had to withdraw to prevent itself from being cut off from the other Japanese armies, and had taken refuge in a range of low mountains, the Pegu Yomas, between the Irrawaddy and the Sittang River, in central Burma. Its commander, Lieutenant General Sakurai Shōzō, planned to breakout from Pegu Yomas across the Sittang and then, along with the surviving elements of the Twenty-Eighth and Thirty-Third armies, retreat into Thailand.

Unfortunately for the Japanese, a Gurkha patrol ambushed and wiped out a small Japanese force and captured a despatch bag containing the complete operational plan for the Japanese break-out. Sakurai launched his bid to breakout across the Sittang on July 15, 1945. The British, however, were waiting. As the Japanese attempted to cross the river, the British artillery and the RAF unleashed massive bombardments on the crossing points. The Japanese were slaughtered.

The ragged remnants of the once mighty Japanese armies in Burma that had swept the British out of the country in 1942, formally surrendered on September 13.

SHELLING
MILE AHEAD
STOP! LISTEN!
GO LIKE HELL

ABOVE: **The war in Burma nears its end. A notice board warns the occupants of a Jeep of the dangers ahead on a stretch of the Mawchi Road during the advance by elements of the Fourteenth Army in June 1945.** (James Luto Collection)

ABOVE: **A Japanese 150mm gun, knocked out by Sherman tanks, is examined by two Indian soldiers of the Fourteenth Army on the Mawchi Road, June 1945.** (James Luto Collection)

NOTES:

1. For details of the actions of the 19th Division, see James Luto, *Fighting with the Fourteenth Army in Burma* (Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2013), pp.82-97.
2. Julian Thompson, *Forgotten Voices of Burma* (Edbury Press, London, 2010), p.343.
3. ibid, p.340.

FIRESTORM

As the US Army, Marines and Navy continued their advance through the Pacific they captured airfields from which the USAAF could strike at the heart of Japan. A new offensive was about to begin.

MIDDLE: Firebombs descend towards the docks and warehouses of Osaka during the USAAF's daylight attack on June 1, 1945, a raid which involved a total of 521 B-29s escorted by 148 P-51 Mustangs. (NARA)

MAIN PICTURE: One of the many B-29s that attacked targets in Japan. This aircraft, nicknamed *Look Homeward Angel*, was the first Superfortress to land at Bolo airfield on Okinawa. Based at Guam, it was returning from a bombing mission over Japan when it was forced to divert because of problems with one of the engines. (NARA

Even whilst operations to fully secure the island of Saipan had been continuing in July 1944, work began on redeveloping the former Japanese airstrip of Aslito. This was later renamed Isley Field and was to be occupied by the USAAF's 73rd Bombardment Wing. The first B-29 Superfortress arrived on Saipan on October 12, 1944, and the first raid from there against Japan took place just six weeks later, on November 24. The target was the Nakajima Aircraft Company's Musashi engine plant just outside Tokyo.

In due course, the Ushi Point airfield on Tinian was also considerably extended to provide four 8,500-foot runways. What was renamed North Field became both the largest airfield in the world and the busiest. It was time for the American strategic bombing offensive against Japan to reveal its full potential, and aircraft from all three main Mariana islands, as well as others in China, began to relentlessly pound targets on the home islands.

Initial teething troubles with the B-29s themselves, and other factors such as the weather, meant that some of the early missions were not effective as they might have been. Lessons, however, were quickly learnt, with the result that effectiveness and accuracy were quickly improved. This was demonstrated on January 19, 1945, when the B-29s took off to attack the Kawasaki Aircraft Industries' engine and airframe complex at Akashi.

Writing after the war, Major General Haywood S. Hansell Jr. USAF declared that the attack "was a magnificent success". He went to state the following: "The bombs were dropped between 1450 and 1524 in clear weather. A total of 610 500-pound bombs were dispensed on the primary targets; 275 (45 percent) hit within the plant areas, measuring roughly 1,200 feet by 4,000 feet for the engine facility and 900 feet by 2,400 feet for the airframe one. Every important building in the engine and airframe complex was hit. Nearly two-thirds of the bombs struck within the engine works. Production in both facilities dropped 90 percent and never recovered.

"Eleven Japanese fighters attacked, the bombers claiming 4 shot down. No B-29s were lost. The mission has been depicted as one of the most perfect examples of selective bombing in the entire war."[1]

FIRESTORM

On the night of March 9/10, 1945, a force of 334 B-29s took off to raid Tokyo under Operation *Meetinghouse*. The subsequent bombing, in which some 279 of the B-29s dropped 1,665 tons of bombs on the Japanese capital, resulted in unparalleled destruction.

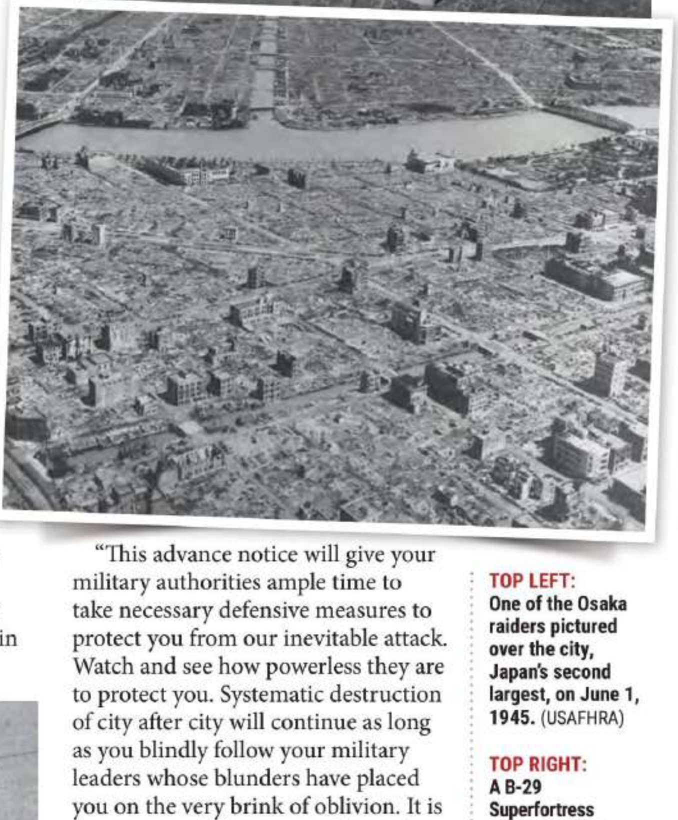
The bombs were mostly 500lb cluster bombs which each released thirty-eight incendiary bomblets filled with jellied gasoline – today known by its common name of napalm. These bomblets ignited on the ground throwing out a jet of flaming napalm which sticks to anything it touches, burning through human flesh down to the bone.

The fires caused by the napalm bombs dropped that night were whipped up by gale-force winds, creating what was, in effect, a firestorm. There was no escape for anyone caught up in the horrific attack, as entire city blocks were engulfed, their occupants asphyxiated as the flames sucked all the oxygen from the air. Approximately 15.8 square miles of the city were destroyed, and some 100,000 people are estimated to have died (though many authors cite much higher figures). *Meetinghouse* clearly showed how, if Emperor Hirohito refused to surrender, Japan would, one way or another, face destruction on a level never seen before.

THE BRINK OF OBLIVION

On the dull, overcast morning of August 3, 1945, B-29 bombers appeared over the city of Hiroshima. But when their bomb doors opened, they released not deadly devices but harmless canisters. At 4,000 feet the canisters were opened by a small charge, and thousands of leaflets floated down to the ground. "Civilians! Evacuate at once!" they declared in Japanese. "These leaflets are being dropped to notify you that your city has been listed for destruction by our powerful air force. The bombing will begin within seventy-two hours.

People make their way through the still smouldering ruins of Tokyo in the immediate aftermath of Operation *Meetinghouse*, March 10, 1945. (via Historic Military Press)



"This advance notice will give your military authorities ample time to take necessary defensive measures to protect you from our inevitable attack. Watch and see how powerless they are to protect you. Systematic destruction of city after city will continue as long as you blindly follow your military leaders whose blunders have placed you on the very brink of oblivion. It is your responsibility to overthrow the military government now and save what is left of your beautiful country. In the meantime, we encourage all civilians to evacuate at once."[2]

Three days later, as we shall see, the B-29s returned as promised.

TOP LEFT:
One of the Osaka raiders pictured over the city, Japan's second largest, on June 1, 1945. (USAFHRA)

TOP RIGHT:
A B-29 Superfortress pictured whilst over the Tokyo district, more specifically the Tama River just west of the city. (NARA)

ABOVE:
A residential area of Tokyo that was destroyed during Operation *Meetinghouse* on the night of March 9/10, 1945. (NARA)

NOTES:

1. Major General Haywood S. Hansell, Jr. USAF, *The Strategic Air War Against Germany and Japan: A Memoir* (Washington, D.C., 1986), pp.266-7.
2. This is given in Bill O'Reilly, *The Day the World Went Nuclear* (Henry Holt, New York, 2017), pp.110-11, though other sources state a different, though similar, message.

RAISING THE FLAG

The tiny island of Iwo Jima, scarcely distinguishable on the map of the vast Pacific Ocean, has become one of the most prominent in the history of the United States, for in the struggle for its possession, more than 40,000 men were killed or wounded.

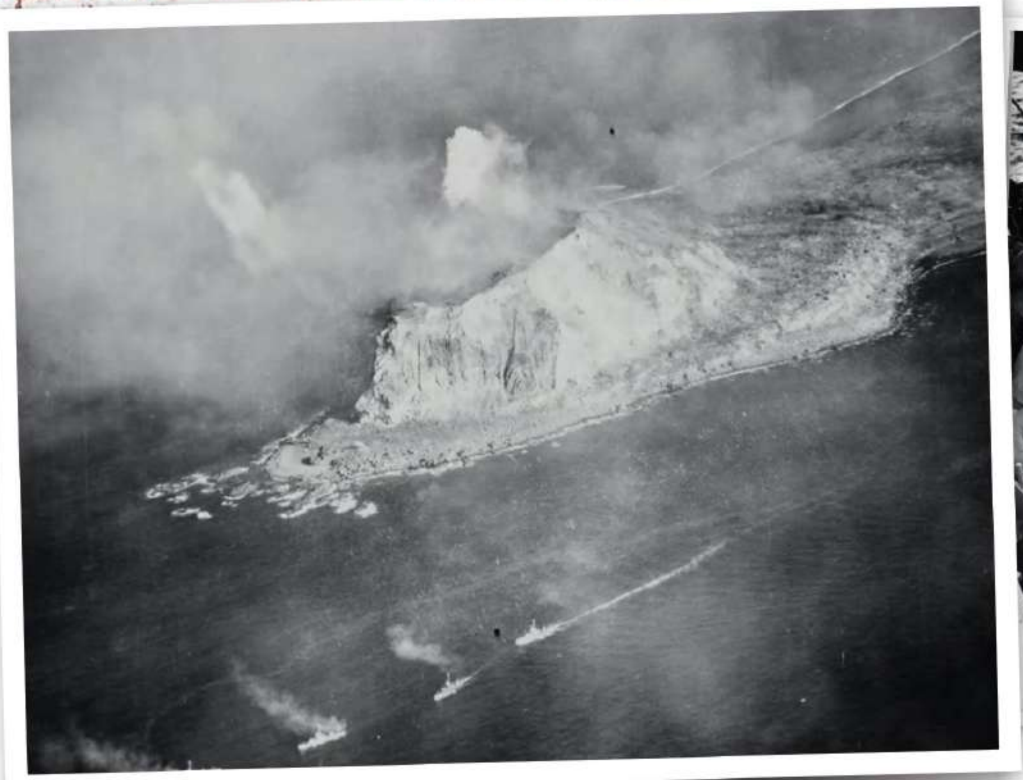
The Allied advance across the Pacific towards Tokyo had developed a self-perpetuating momentum. If Japan was to be beaten, ran the military logic, an invasion of its Home Islands was inevitable. Such an operation could only be mounted if air supremacy was gained over the invasion beaches, as had been the case during the Normandy landings in June 1944. For this to be achieved, islands within the range of fighter aircraft would have to be taken by force. Thus was perceived the necessity of capturing Iwo Jima as an essential stepping stone towards Okinawa from where the invasion could be launched.

There were other, seemingly more pressing reasons for US commanders to wish for the capture of Iwo Jima. Since November 1944, USAAF long-range aircraft had been bombing Japan from their new bases in the Marianas. Iwo Jima acted as an early warning station for Japan, giving Tokyo two hours' notice of an impending air raid. In addition to this, Zero fighters from Iwo Jima's airfields had attacked B-29s whilst en route to their targets. These, therefore, were the reasons for the invasion of Iwo Jima. That operation was given the codename *Detachment*. But could the desired objectives have been accomplished without the enormous loss of life for which the Battle of Iwo Jima has become so sadly associated?

As for the Japanese, there was no doubt in their minds that the US would attack Iwo Jima. Equally, there was no doubt that the Americans would succeed. They would, though, make its capture as hard as possible and would inflict very heavy casualties upon the invaders. It was hoped that American »

LEFT: **The battleship USS *New York* bombarding Japanese positions on Iwo Jima, February 16, 1945. She has just fired the left-hand 14/45 gun of No.4 turret.** (US Navy)

BELOW: **US Navy and US Coast Guard landing craft of all types crowd onto the assault beach at Iwo Jima whilst bringing the 4th and 5th Marine divisions ashore on February 19, 1945.** (NARA)



ABOVE LEFT: A column of LCS(L)s, or Landing Craft, Support (Large), passing the distinctive shape of Mount Suribachi, on the southern end of Iwo Jima, during the pre-invasion bombardment, February 17-19, 1945. (US Navy)

ABOVE RIGHT: On the deck of a Coast Guard–manned LST, Marines, Seabees, and Coast Guardsmen kneel on the foredeck in final prayers before "Zero Hour sends them into the fury of beach battle on Iwo Jima". (NARA)

BELOW: LSTs and other invasion shipping off Iwo Jima's east beaches, at H-Hour +1, on February 19, 1945. This is the view as seen from the battleship USS *Texas*. (USNHHC)

losses would be so high that the Allies would think again about invading the Home Islands. Every one of Lieutenant General Tadamichi Kuribayashi's 21,000 men was expected to die in the battle to come, and equally expected to take ten of the enemy with them.

"HELL ON EARTH"

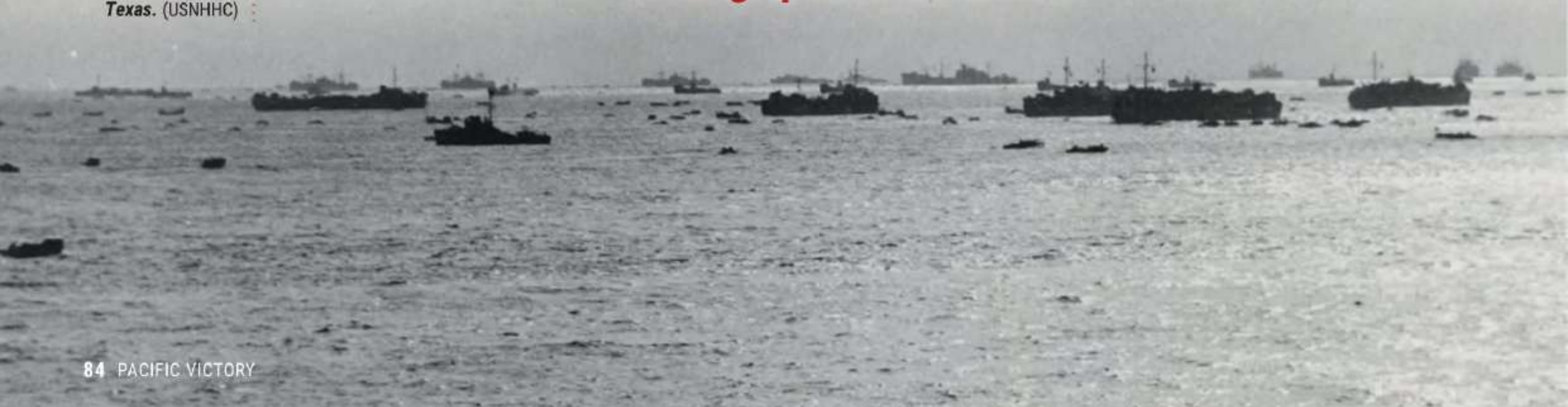
From the outset, problems emerged for the invaders. Well aware that the Japanese were likely to fight to the death, the man who would lead the attack upon Iwo Jima, Major General Harry Schmidt USMC, requested a ten-day bombardment of the island. All he got was three days, two of which were truncated by poor visibility. On the other hand, Iwo Jima had been under almost continuous aerial attack since August 1944, mostly from air bases in the Marianas, and it was believed that the Japanese defences had been blasted into oblivion. That such an assessment was fatally incorrect became apparent on the second day of the bombardment when the battleship USS *Tennessee* and the cruiser USS *Pensacola* were hit by Japanese artillery. But it was too late to delay the attack, and on the morning of February 19, 1945, the 4th and 5th Marine divisions landed side by side on Iwo Jima, leaving the 3rd Marine Division to follow on D+1.

The heavy guns of Admiral Raymond Spruance's Fifth Fleet rained shells upon the island ahead of the Marines. "Black smoke covered the island, and shrapnel was flying all over the place with a shrieking sound," wrote one of the few Japanese who survived the battle, Takahashi Toshiharu. "Trees with trunks one metre across were blown out of the ground, roots uppermost. The sound was deafening… Even in a cave thirty metres underground, my body was jerked off the ground. It was hell on earth."[1]

The first wave of LVT(A)s, armed with close-support 75mm guns mounted in turrets, hit the landing beach at 09.02 hours. Their task was to manoeuvre off the beach and provide fire support for the second wave – the first of the Marine battalions. Sergeant John Ryland Thurman was with the 5th Division's 27th Regiment: "Chills ran up our back when we first laid foot on the black sand, sinking up over our ankles. We did not know what to expect and it was like pulling our feet out of thick mud. We knew there would be no digging foxholes in this stuff, we were to keep moving and take ground."

The plans for D-Day were for the capture of Mount Suribachi, the 528-foot dormant volcano which completely dominates the island, by one regiment of the 5th Division, as well as the capture of Airfield No.1 by the 4th Division. These objectives proved woefully optimistic as the advancing Marines were mowed down by machine-gun and rifle fire from

"Chills ran up our back when we first laid foot on the black sand, sinking up over our ankles."



skilfully concealed emplacements as they struggled through the volcanic sand. At the same time, mortar and artillery shells began exploding all along the beaches from positions which were hard to locate. "The beach was a pile of wreckage," recalled Marine Private Muscarella. "Tanks and amtracs were stuck in the heavy sand everywhere. Some had been flipped over on their backs by exploding mines and shells." D-Day had proved to be more difficult than expected, with 2,420 casualties being recorded, but the Marines were ashore and were there to stay.

As night fell on Iwo Jima, the Marines prepared to face the banzai attack which had followed every previous island invasion. But Kuribayashi, wisely, saw such reckless charges as futile as none had ever succeeded in driving the Americans back to their ships and had been hugely costly to the Japanese. Yet there was no rest for the Marines as Japanese mortars and artillery pounded their lines relentlessly throughout the night.

LEFT: With their LCVP only yards from their landing beach, men of the Fifth Marine Division steel themselves for the battle they are about to enter, February 19, 1945. (US Coast Guard)

D+1 saw the beginning of the operation to capture the formidable Mount Suribachi in the south, and the long, exhausting drive to the north to clear the airfields and the remainder of the island. It was the 28th Marine Regiment which was handed the job of taking Mount Suribachi and in doing so produce what is probably the most iconic image of the Second World War in the East.

REACHING THE SUMMIT

All morning the Marines struggled to overcome the Japanese at the base of the mountain, but enemy resistance continued, particularly from well-camouflaged pillboxes hidden in the brush. At 11.00 hours, tanks joined in the fray, helping the Marines overcome the pillboxes one by one. Nevertheless, when the action was terminated for the night, the Marines had advanced just 200 yards.

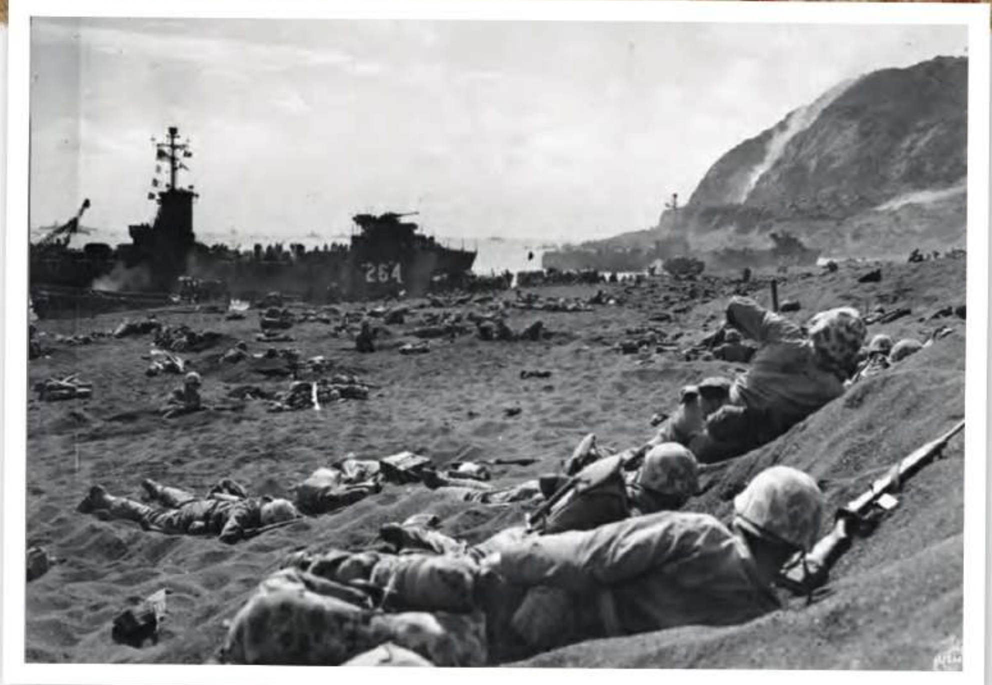
Once again, the Marines, still expecting a counter-attack, stood-to during the hours of darkness, with the Navy firing star shells to illuminate the area. But once again the dreaded banzai charge did not materialise, though, as before, harassing fire from the Japanese meant another sleepless night.

The following morning, forty carrier aircraft blasted the Japanese positions which had created such difficulty for the Marines. The pattern for D+2 was a repeat of the previous day, with small gains being achieved with the help of the Sherman tanks. By the end of the day, the 28th Regiment had all-but surrounded the mountain.

D+3 saw the 28th Regiment consolidate its position at the foot of Mount Suribachi using flame throwers and demolitions to neutralise the Japanese fortifications. One company of the regiment also penetrated to the very southern tip of the island. All was set for the attempt to scale the northern face of the mountain.

On the morning of February 23, D+4 of the Battle of Iwo Jima, Lieutenant Colonel Johnson sent out two three-man patrols from Companies 'D' and 'F' to reconnoitre suitable routes up Mount Suribachi and probe for enemy resistance. Surprisingly, no hostile fire was encountered, and Marines reached the edge of the crater at 09.40 hours. Similarly, Company 'E' sent out a forty-strong patrol to support the men of the other two companies, and, again, the only Japanese troops they found were dead ones.

Nervously the Marines inched their way up and over the lip of the crater, only to be suddenly faced by the enemy. A small group of Japanese soldiers opened fire and a savage firefight ensued. »



ABOVE: US Marines take cover on the beach after landing on Iwo Jima on February 19, 1945. Mount Suribachi can be seen smoking in the background. (USMC Archives)

LEFT: While a terrific barrage pounds the surrounding beach, a US Navy Medical Corpsman dresses a wounded Marine while awaiting the barrage to end so they can move forward, February 19, 1945. (USMC Archives)

RIGHT: Marines of the 2nd Battalion, 27th Regiment take cover on the beach after landing on Iwo Jima during the afternoon of February 19, 1945. The dominating slopes of Mount Suribachi can be seen smoking in the background. (USMC Archives)

BELOW: A USMC 37mm gun fires on Japanese positions on the slopes of Mount Suribachi, February 21. (USNHHC)

The Marines had carried with them a US flag to raise on the summit of the mountain and, even as the mini battle raged, they found a length of pipe lying on the ground and the 54 inch by 28 inch flag was tied to the top and lifted aloft over Mount Suribachi. "Just moments after the flag was raised we heard a roar from down below," Private First Class Ray Jacobs of Company 'F' proudly remembered. "Marines on the ground, still engaged in combat, raised a spontaneous yell when they saw the flag. Screaming and cheering was so loud and prolonged that we could hear it quite clearly on top of Suribachi. The boats on the beach and the ships at sea joined in. It was a highly emotional, strongly patriotic moment for us all."[2]

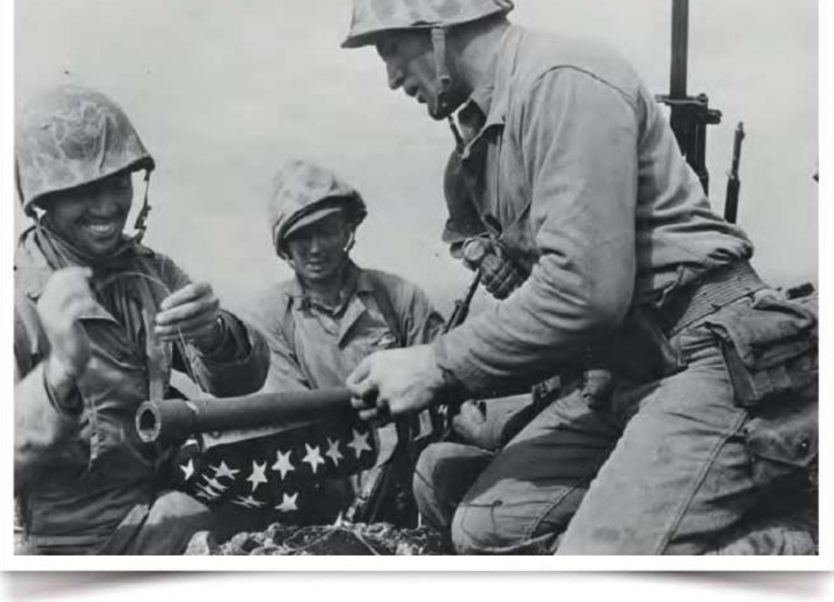
"MAKE IT A BIGGER ONE"

However, the story of the raising of the Stars and Stripes on Mount Suribachi does not stop there. The Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, who had joined the expeditionary force, had decided the previous night that he wanted to go ashore and witness the final stage of the fight for the mountain. Accompanied by Lieutenant General Holland Smith USMC, he reached the beach just after the flag had gone up. Forrestal was so taken with the fervour of the moment among the cheering Marines, that he decided he wanted the flag as a souvenir. News of this was not well received by the 2nd Battalion Commander, Chandler Johnson, who was determined that the flag would stay with the battalion. So, he sent his assistant operations officer, Lieutenant Ted Tuttle, to the beach to obtain a replacement flag. As an afterthought, Johnson called after Tuttle: "And make it a bigger one."[3]

Taking a large 96 inch by 56 inch flag from one of the ships on the beach, LST 779, Tuttle handed it to a runner from Company 'E', Private First Class Rene Gagnon, and instructed the commander of a detachment which was heading for the summit of Mount Suribachi, to take Gagnon and the flag with him and swap the flags over. Meanwhile, Joe Rosenthal of the Associated Press and two Marine photographers were also on their way up the volcano when they met Staff Sergeant Louis R Lowery of *Leatherneck* magazine making his way down. Lowery told the group that he had already photographed the flag being raised, but that there was a terrific view to be seen from the top of Suribachi.

Rosenthal's little party continued up the mountain, arriving there to see a group of Marines attaching a large flag

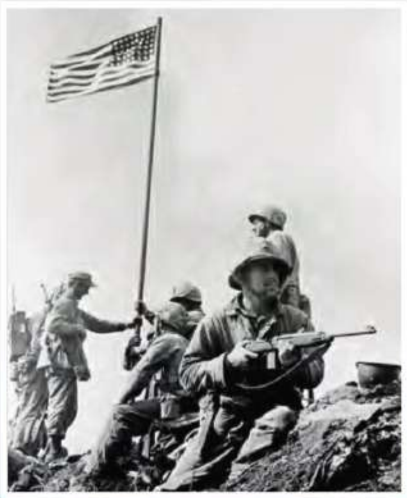
RIGHT: On the summit of Mount Suribachi, Marines of the 28th Regiment, 5th Marine Division are pictured tying the Stars and Stripes to a piece of pipe that had been found lying on the battlefield, February 23, 1945. The photograph was taken by Staff Sergeant Louis R Lowery, USMC, a staff photographer for *Leatherneck* magazine.



to a pipe. While the others were setting up their equipment, Rosenthal saw six Marines raising the flag and was able to capture that photograph which has come to symbolise the war in the Pacific, and which earned Rosenthal a Pulitzer Prize.

When President Roosevelt saw the photograph, he immediately recognised its potential to stir the American public into subscribing to the upcoming Seventh War Loan Drive. He ordered the men involved to be identified and flown back to Washington. Only three of those identified had survived and these three took part in a re-enactment of the raising of the flag in Washington to launch the Loan Drive.

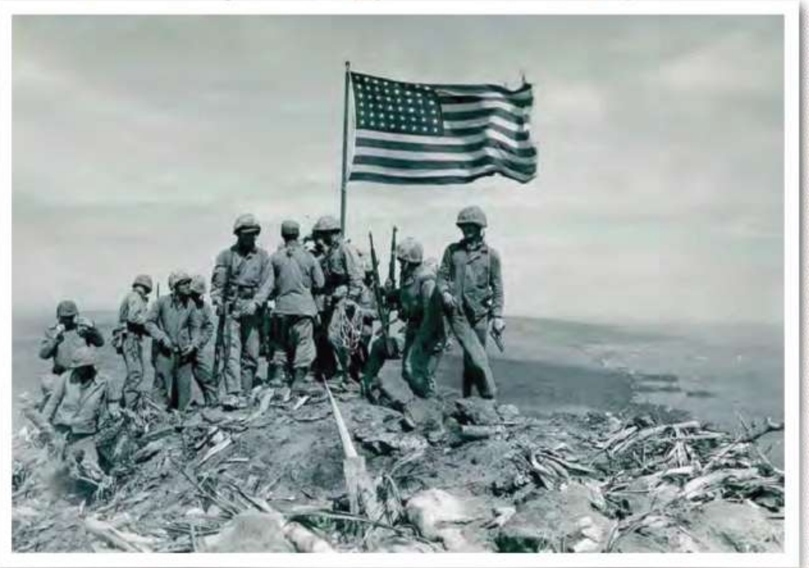
But eventually, word slipped out that the iconic scene was not the original flag raising ceremony and that the flag itself was a replacement. There were accusations that Rosenthal had staged the event, followed by suggestions that some of the six Marines in the photograph had been mis-identified. Debate around the incident continues to this day.



MIDDLE: Another image obtained by Staff Sergeant Louis R Lowery, this picture was taken some seventeen minutes before the scene photographed by Joe Rosenthal. Holding the flagpole are Sergeant Henry O Hansen, Private Philip L Ward, and Pharmacist's Mate 2nd Class John Bradley. In the foreground, Private First Class J R Michaels stands guard with his M1 Carbine. Corporal C W Lindberg is behind him.

"A MURDEROUS BLANKET OF FIRE"

It had taken five days to take Mount Suribachi at the cost of 895 Marines but, with the capture of the towering volcano, hopes were high of clearing the rest of the island swiftly. How wrong that would prove to be.



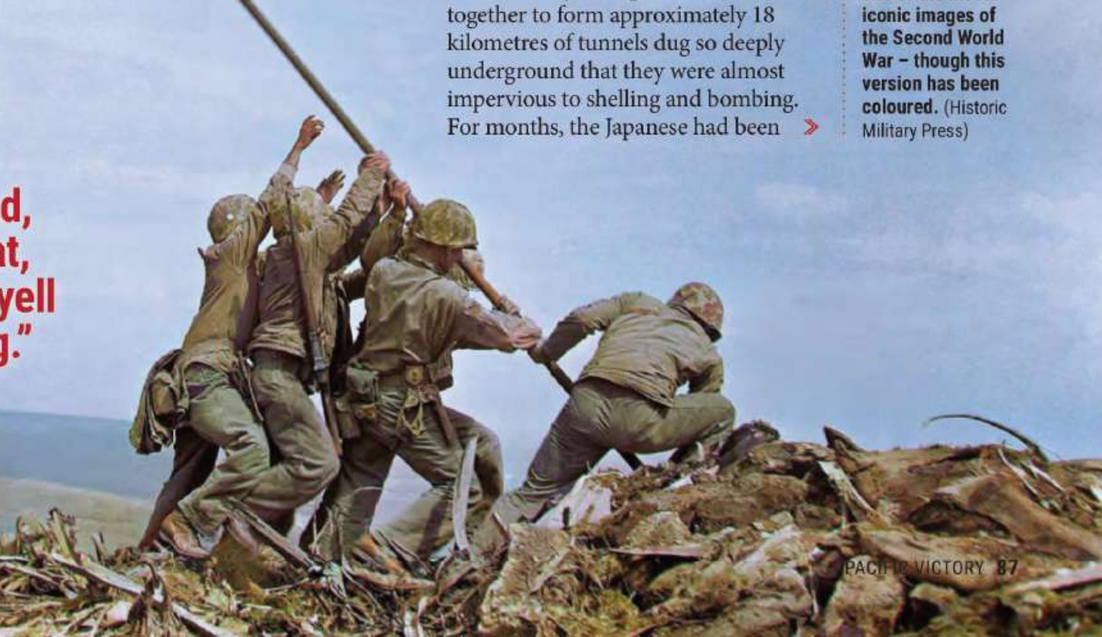
LEFT: The first Flag Raising on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, February 23, 1945. After they had captured the summit of Mount Suribachi, Marines of the 28th Regiment, 5th Marine Division hoisted the Stars and Stripes on a piece of pipe that had been found lying on the battlefield, at about 10.20 hours. (USMC Archives)

Kuribayashi had concentrated the majority of his forces not on Suribachi but in the central and northern part of the island where he had employed every conceivable means to make the defences of this sector virtually impregnable. The entire area was a mass of cliffs, ravines, gorges, crevices, and ledges and within this setting the Japanese were deeply entrenched in hundreds of blockhouses, bunkers, pillboxes, caves, and camouflaged tanks. All possible approaches to the north were guarded by weapons of every description and manned by soldiers willing to die for the Emperor.

Elements of the 23rd, 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th Marine regiments had been pushing north since D+1, receiving heavy losses with each advance. "There was no cover from enemy fire," wrote one Marine who survived to tell the tale. "Japs deep in reinforced concrete pillboxes laid down interlocking bands of fire that cut whole companies to ribbons. Camouflage hid all the enemy installations. The high ground on every side was honeycombed with layer after layer of Jap emplacements, blockhouses, dugouts, and observation posts. Their observation was perfect; whenever the Marines made a move, the Japs watched every step, and when the moment came, their mortars, rockets, machine guns, and artillery, long ago zeroed-in, would smother the area in a murderous blanket of fire. The counterbattery fire and preparatory barrages of Marine artillery and naval gunfire were often ineffective, for the Japs would merely retire to a lower level or inner cave and wait until the storm had passed. Then they would emerge and blast the advancing Marines."[4]

Some of those caves were huge caverns which could hold up to 400 men; others just small excavations where just a handful of troops could shelter. Many, though, were linked together to form approximately 18 kilometres of tunnels dug so deeply underground that they were almost impervious to shelling and bombing. For months, the Japanese had been »

"Marines on the ground, still engaged in combat, raised a spontaneous yell when they saw the flag."



BELOW: The second Flag Raising ceremony on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, on February 23, 1945. Taken by the Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal, this is one of the most iconic images of the Second World War – though this version has been coloured. (Historic Military Press)

ABOVE: One of the few Japanese prisoners taken on Iwo Jima is brought back to the beach by men of the 3rd Marine Division. (USNHHC)

preparing for this battle and every feature of the ground had been utilized to make approaches from the south as hazardous as possible. In total, Kuribayashi had 361 artillery pieces, seventy-seven mortars, thirty-three large-calibre coastal defence guns, nearly 300 anti-aircraft guns, sixty-nine anti-tank guns, seventy rocket launchers and twenty-four tanks at his disposal.

LIVING BOOBY TRAPS

The key to seizing the remainder of the island was the flat, high ground in the centre known as the Motoyama Plateau which was riddled with caves and bunkers. Day after day, the Marines attacked the Japanese positions there. Even when isolated and surrounded, the Japanese refused to be driven from their caves and, more often than not, the only way to take the caves was with flame-throwers, hand-held or mounted on tanks, which burned the defenders alive or, in the deeper caves or tunnels, by demolishing the entrances and sealing the Japanese into what would become their tombs. In efforts to stop the US tanks, volunteers strapped explosives on their backs to become living booby traps, lying in the path of the oncoming vehicles.

So well concealed were the caves, Marines would be unaware that they had passed them until they were attacked from their flanks or rear. Every advance seemed to become a disaster, wrote one observer, as "units were raked from the flanks, chewed up, and sometimes wiped out. Tanks were destroyed by interlocking fire or were hoisted into the air on the spouting fireballs of buried mines".[5] Artillery bombardment preceded every advance and carrier-borne dive-bombers lashed the northern part of the island, but all, seemingly, to little effect.

RIGHT: The unloading of supplies and reinforcements continues on Beach Green One, with Mount Suribachi in the background, on February 24. The small wrecked ship in the foreground is Japanese. The landing ship nearest to Suribachi is LST-779, from which the second flag raised on the volcano was obtained. (US Navy)

Kuribayashi's defensive tactics were proving highly effective, but the Marines, despite mounting losses, continued to advance. By March 8, the Japanese situation had become desperate, and Kuribayashi knew that his men, half-starved, thirsty and exhausted, could not hold out much longer. So too did Major General Sadasue Senda, the commander of the 2nd Mixed Brigade. Ignoring the orders of his superior officer, he threw his 1,500 men, armed with bamboo spears, rifles, grenades and a few light machine-guns, at the Americans that night in a banzai charge. Just as Kuribayashi had predicted, such reckless acts had only ever had one outcome. In this instance, at least 800 of his men were killed.

The following afternoon, a patrol of the 3rd Marines reached the north-eastern end of the island. The persistence of the Marines was gradually paying off, as, one-by-one, the enemy's pillboxes were demolished, blockhouses blasted into rubble and observation posts destroyed.

Including a knocked-out Sherman tank, this is the scene on Blue Beach No.1, where the 4th Marine Division fought its way ashore, in the days after the initial landings. Some of the 800 ships that took part in the invasion are visible in the background. (USNHHC)

Iwo Jima was finally declared secured on the evening of March 16, though isolated resistance continued for another ten days. All but 216 of Kuribayashi's men sacrificed their lives. As for Kuribayashi, he carried out his final act on March 27. At the entrance to the cave which had become his last refuge, he faced north towards his Emperor's Imperial Palace and stabbed himself in the abdomen before lowering his head – the signal for a staff officer, Colonel Kaneji Nakane, to perform the coup de grâce by raising his sword and slashing it down on the general's neck.

UNPRECEDENTED CASUALTIES

Just as Kuribayashi had hoped, US losses had been horrendous, with the Americans suffering 26,040 casualties, marking the only time in the Pacific War that the Marines lost more men than the Japanese. But the question which has emerged since 1945 is whether or not such losses were necessary, or could Iwo Jima simply have been bypassed and the Japanese garrison left to starve?

The motives given earlier for the seizure of Iwo Jima are those stated by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Yet, almost all of those objectives were met prior to any Marine setting foot on the volcanic sand. The first reason given for Operation *Detachment* was that fighters based there could provide escort cover for bombers targeting the Japanese mainland. But Iwo Jima lies outside the P-51 Mustang's combat range. Efforts by Iwo Jima based fighters to escort B-29s flying from the Marianas proved dismal failures and were eventually scrapped.

The second reason was that Zero fighters from Iwo Jima were interfering with the B-29s flying to Japan from the Marianas. The reality is that no B-29 was ever shot down near Iwo Jima during a mission, or, indeed, by any enemy aircraft flying out of Iwo Jima. While it is true that stations on Iwo Jima had been able to give Tokyo advance warning of an air raid, the ineffective Japanese radar still could not pinpoint when and where the B-29s would fly and what their targets might be.

Possibly even more egregious is the failure of the US commanders to target the most critical resource on the island – water. The only source of water on Iwo Jima was rainwater which was collected in large, highly visible and unprotected concrete water cisterns. If these had been destroyed by the guns and aircraft of the Navy, instead of focussing upon the enemy's fortifications (which were virtually impregnable anyway), the Japanese would have been forced to surrender or die of dehydration. In fact, Kuribayashi's men, cut off from the outside world, had been on half-rations of water for weeks before the invasion even began.[6]

By February 1945, Iwo Jima had become a strategic irrelevance but with the decision having been made to capture the island, that momentum which had propelled the Allies across the Pacific proved unstoppable not just to the Japanese but also in the minds of the US commanders. The reasons given for its capture are, like Rosenthal's photograph of the raising of the flag on Suribachi, something of a charade.

TOP LEFT: The wreckage of a Japanese Army Mitsubishi Ki-46-II Dinah reconnaissance aircraft on one of the recently captured airfields on Iwo Jima, February 24, 1945. (NARA)

TOP RIGHT: A flamethrower operator of Company 'K', 9th Marines, goes over the top to assault a Japanese pillbox on Iwo Jima's Airfield No.2. (USMC Archives)

MIDDLE: After 24 days of some of the bitterest fighting in the history of the US Marine Corps, the US flag is officially raised near Mount Suribachi on March 14, 194,5 after a proclamation from Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz officially took possession of the island. (NARA)

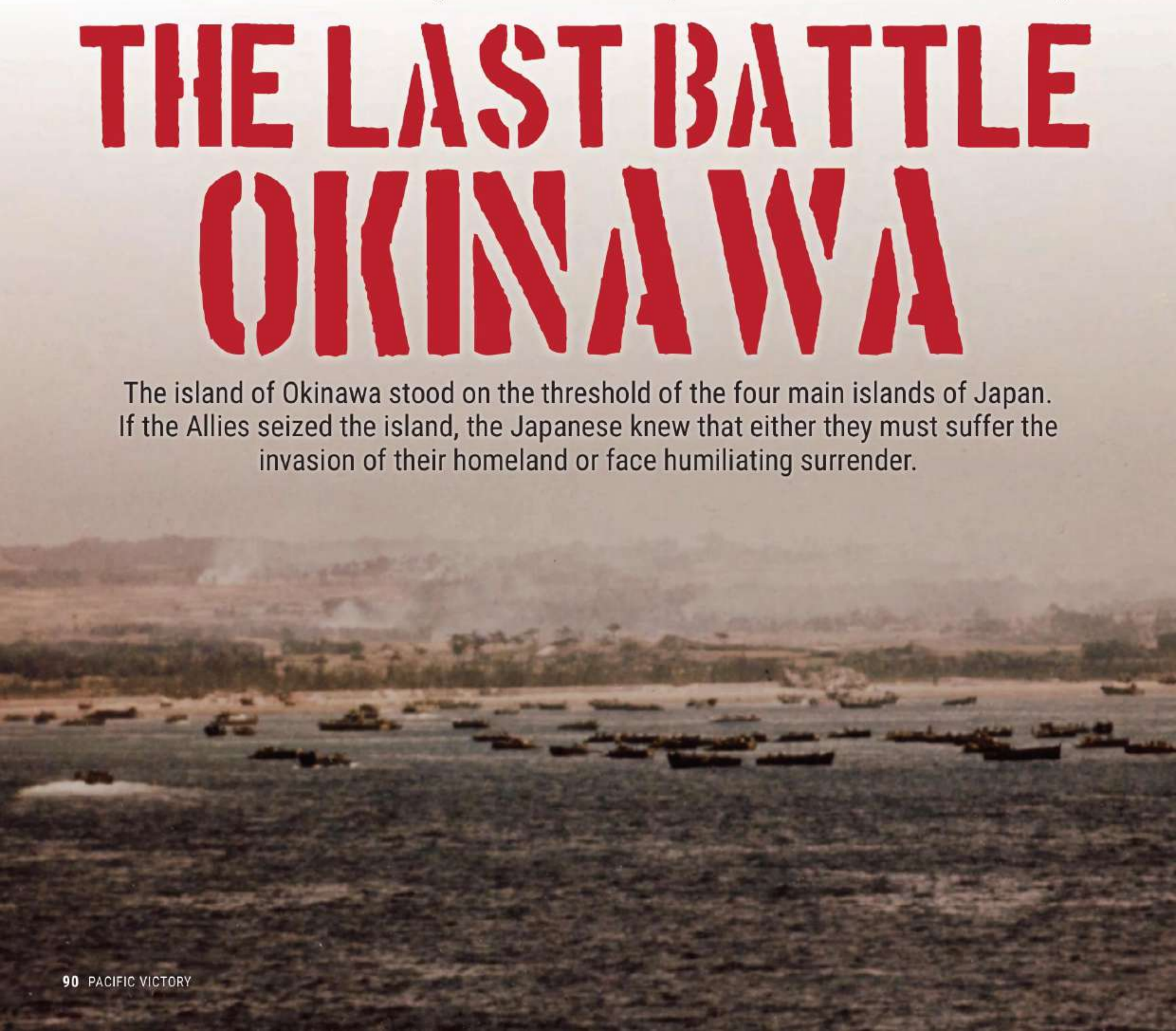
LEFT: As the battle for Iwo Jima grinds towards its conclusion, US Marine Corps rocket-launching trucks fire on Japanese positions on February 28, 1945. (USNHHC)

NOTES:

1. Kumiko Kakehashi, *Letters from Iwo Jima* (Phoenix, London, 2007), p.102.
2. Mark Khan, *The Battle of Iwo Jima, Raising the Flag, February-March 1945* (Frontline, Barnsley, 2018), p.63.
3. James Bradley, *Flags of Our Fathers* (Bantam, London, 2006), p.207.
4. Carl W. Proehl, *The Fourth Marine Division in World War II* (Infantry Journal Press, 1946), pp. 152-3.
5. Robert Leckie, *Delivered from Evil* (Harper & Row, New York, 1987), p.870.
6. Jonathan T. Baker, *Iwo Jima: The Unnecessary Battle* (Defense Technical Information Center, Fort Belvoir, 2007).

THE LAST BATTLE OKINAWA

The island of Okinawa stood on the threshold of the four main islands of Japan. If the Allies seized the island, the Japanese knew that either they must suffer the invasion of their homeland or face humiliating surrender.



MAIN PICTURE: Landing craft and LVTs crowd an Okinawa beach shortly after the landings began on April 1, 1945. (USNHHC)

Some 4,000 miles of ocean, and more than three years of war, separated Okinawa from Pearl Harbor. Many had been the Allied victories in those vast waters and those long years, and the Empire of the Rising Sun had faded beyond the horizon of history. Yet still Japan fought on, and as the Allies closed in on Tokyo, the enemy battled with increasing tenacity. As the American Chiefs of Staff planned their assault upon the Ryukyu Islands, of which Okinawa is the most important, the one thing they knew for certain was that it would be a bloodbath.

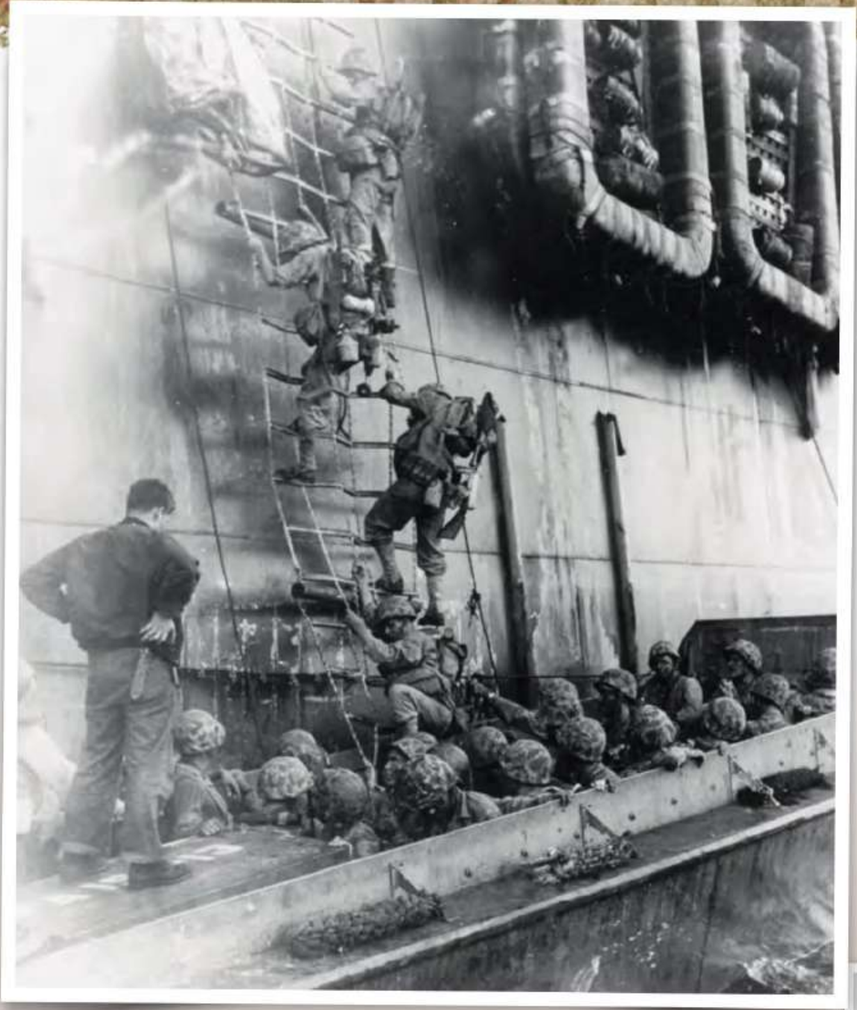
Whilst the huge long-range B-29 Superfortresses were bombing the Japanese home islands from the airfields in the Marianas, the Ryukyu islands were within medium bomber range of the industrial cities of Japan. With their capture, it was estimated that a further 780 bombers, along with the necessary fighter escorts, could be operated from Okinawa against Japan.

Okinawa is approximately 60 miles long and 18 miles across at its widest point. Encircled in coral reefs, the northern two-thirds of the island is extremely rugged and mountainous. A central ridge, with heights of 1,000 feet or more, runs through the length of this region which ends at the coast in steep cliffs. About 80 per cent of this area was covered by pine forests interspersed with dense undergrowth. The southern third of Okinawa, meanwhile, is rolling, hilly country, lower than the north but broken by terraces, steep natural escarpments, and ravines within which the natural caves and ridges are ideal for defence. It is in this region where most of the population lives, where most of the island's food is cultivated. There also, are the airfields and the main towns. It would be in this area that the Battle of Okinawa would be fought.

THE GREATEST FORCE IN THE PACIFIC

The Directive issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff for the invasion of Okinawa, with a target completion date of March 1, 1945, called for the capture of the southern portion, along with small adjacent islands. Bases would then be established, from which the rest of the island could be seized. With the operational codename *Iceberg*, the offensive was scheduled to begin on April 1.

The devastating defeats sustained by the Imperial Japanese Navy meant that it could not interfere with an operation against Okinawa in any meaningful way, so it was anticipated that opposition to an invasion would mostly be limited to static and aerial defence. Though Japan still had three battleships, one light aircraft carrier and three converted cruiser-carriers afloat, the US Fifth Fleet and the Royal Navy's Pacific Fleet had a combined strength



of twenty battleships and forty-four aircraft carriers of all types, as well as a massive predominance in cruisers, destroyers and submarines.

The land forces were equally disproportionate, with more than half a million troops of the US Tenth Army available, half of whom were combat troops. The Japanese 32nd Army under the command of Mitsuru Ushijima numbered just 76,000, with some 20,000 Okinawan conscripts pressed into service.

The Japanese, however, still had an effective air force, believed, at the time to number in the region of 1,500 aircraft, although this proved to be an underestimation. What the Japanese faced, though, was the greatest concentration of land, sea, and air forces ever used in the Pacific.

L-DAY

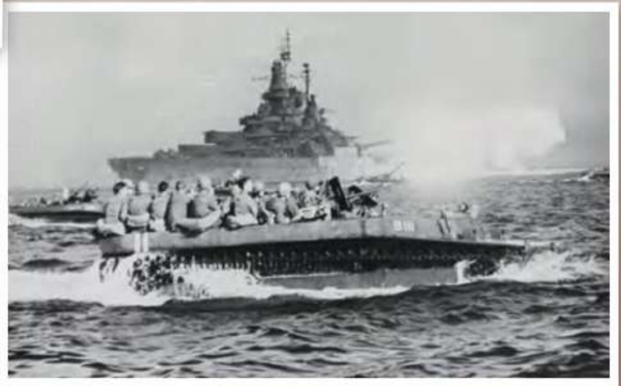
Okinawa had already been the subject of attacks by the US Navy, with heavy bombardments being carried out by Vice Admiral Mitscher's Fast Carrier Task Force in October 1944 and again in January and repeatedly in early March 1945. These strikes were aimed at isolating Okinawa by sinking supply ships and at reducing Ushijima's defensive capacity.

The first landings in the Ryukyus were on the Kerama Islands, fifteen miles west of Okinawa. These were seized six days before the invasion of Okinawa. After this, underwater demolition teams and minesweepers cleared the invasion beaches of mines, booby traps and other obstacles. Then, on March 26, the preliminary naval bombardment began.

For seven days, the guns of Task Force 58 fired more than 13,000 large-calibre shells onto the island, with a total weight of 5,162 tons. All known coastal defence guns in the invasion area were destroyed or severely damaged, including all suspected caves and installations in the cliffs and rocky points overlooking and flanking the beaches. Aircraft from Task Force 58, meanwhile, concentrated on targets that could not be reached by naval gunfire. On the afternoon of March 31, Rear Admiral William Blandy announced that the preliminary bombardment was "sufficient". »

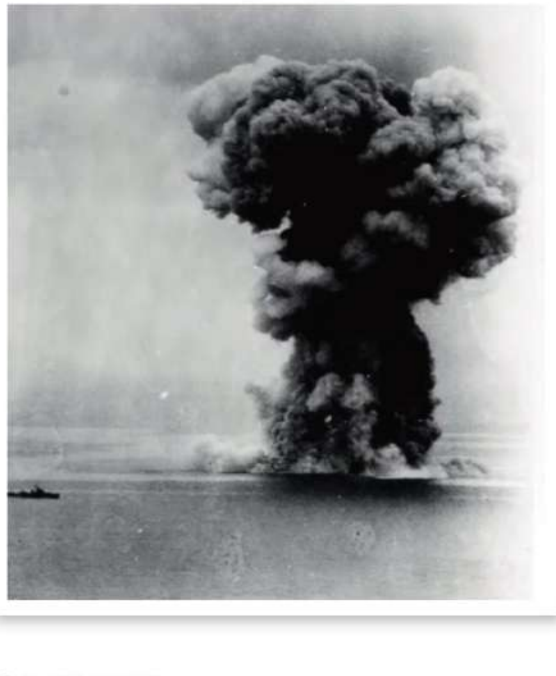
LEFT: US Marines climb down a debarkation ladder from a Coast Guard-manned assault transport to board an LCVP which would transport them into the shore during the initial landings on Okinawa on April 1, 1945. (USNHHC)

BELOW: Troop laden LVT-4 amphibious tractors head for Purple and Orange beaches on Okinawa. The picture was taken just before H-Hour on April 1, 1945. In the background, the battleship USS *Tennessee* can be seen firing her 5"/38 secondary battery at targets ashore. (US Navy)



US troops of the 27th Infantry Division heading in to one of the landing beaches at Okinawa, in this case Purple Beach. (National Museum of the US Navy)

RIGHT: USS *Idaho* bombarding Okinawa with her 14/50 main battery guns on April 1, 1945. (US Navy)



BELOW: Photographed by an aircraft operating from USS *Yorktown*, this is the moment that the Japanese battleship *Yamato* blew up following sustained US attacks north of Okinawa on April 7, 1945. One of her escorting destroyers can be seen on the left. (USNHHC)

Though the preliminary operations had all gone to plan, there was one disturbing element the Allied warships had encountered – the extensive use of kamikaze aircraft. Around 100 Japanese planes had conducted fifty raids, damaging eight US warships. These suicide tactics would prove to be a feature of the struggle for Okinawa, the Allied invasion of which began on schedule, on the morning of 1 April.

WHERE ARE THE JAPANESE

Dawn, on Easter Sunday of 1945, revealed to the anxious Japanese garrison the awe-inspiring vista of a horizon obscured by the silhouettes of a staggering 1,300 warships and landing craft. At 08.20 hours, the leading LVTs moved towards the Okinawan coast, forming an almost unbroken line eight miles long. Ten minutes later the first of these reached the shore, under the cover of a massive bombardment. With surprising ease, elements of the 1st and 6th Marine divisions scrambled ashore north of the Bishi river, while the 7th and 96th Infantry divisions of Major General John R Hodge's XXIV Corps landed to the south. In the first hour of the invasion alone, some 16,000 men were put ashore.

Meeting no opposition from the enemy, the attackers moved inland cautiously, their immediate objectives being two airfields, Kadena and Yontan, each about a mile inland. The Americans found them deserted and both were taken before noon; wrecked Japanese planes and quantities of supplies were strewn about on each of them. By nightfall, the beachhead, which was 15,000 yards long and 5,000 yards deep, was packed full with more than 60,000 men along with artillery and tanks. The only real opposition came from the air, with a kamikaze aircraft slamming into the battleship USS *West Virginia*.

Only limited opposition was encountered over the course of the following two days, as the American troops moved out across the island, separating the defending forces in the south from those in the north. By April 4, the Tenth Army was fully established on Okinawa, holding an area 15 miles long by up to ten miles wide. The beachhead included the two airfields and the beaches which could take immense tonnage from the cargo ships, and sufficient space for the dumps and installations that were rapidly being built for the base from which the 200,000 or more men would mount the operations that would see Okinawa in Allied hands. All had gone astonishingly well so far, but one thing puzzled the invaders – where were the Japanese?

BLOOD AND GUTS

The answer to that question was simply that the Japanese knew that it was impossible to defeat the Allies and that the most that could be done was to deny them the use of the island for as long a period as possible and inflict the maximum number of casualties. Acting on this assumption, General Ushijima drew his forces together into the southern part of Okinawa and, from the strongly fortified positions around Shuri, prepared to make his stand there as costly to the enemy as possible. He would not go out to meet the invaders; he would wait for them to come to him and force them to fight on his own terms, for it was certain that wherever the Americans landed, they would eventually come up against the Shuri defences. There, caves, emplacements, blockhouses, and pillboxes had been built into the hills and escarpments, connected by elaborate

underground tunnels and carefully camouflaged. Artillery and mortars were emplaced in the caves and thoroughly integrated into the general scheme of defensive fires.

The Japanese defence of Okinawa, though, was far from passive. On April 6, for example, the Imperial Air Force mounting heavy attacks by a force of some 400 aircraft, including a number that were clearly kamikazes. Serving aboard the cruiser USS *Montpelier*, Seaman First Class James J Fahey wrote of the horror of the kamikaze attacks: "A Jap plane made a suicide dive at the cruiser *St. Louis*; there was a big explosion and flames were seen shortly from the stern. Another one tried to do the same thing but he was shot down. A Jap plane came in on a battleship with its guns blazing away. Other Jap planes came in strafing one ship, dropping their bombs on another and crashing into another ship.

"The Jap planes were falling all around us, the air was full of Jap machine gun bullets. Jap planes and bombs were hitting all around us. Some of our ships were being hit by suicide planes, bombs and machine gun fire. It was a fight to the finish… Planes were falling all around us, bombs were coming too close for comfort. The Jap planes were cutting up the water with machine gun fire. All the guns on the ships were blazing away… The deck near my mount was covered with blood, guts, brains, tongues, scalps, hearts, arms etc. from the Jap pilots. The Jap bodies were blown into all sorts of pieces."[1]

Between March 26 and April 30, 20 American ships were sunk and 157 damaged by enemy action. Suicide attacks accounted for the sinking of 14 ships and the damaging of 90 more. In the same period, the Japanese lost more than 1,100 aircraft.

That night, April 6/7, the remnants of the Japanese fleet also sallied forth to make its expected attack. The Japanese warships were met by the aircraft of Task Force 58 in a very one-sided engagement which saw the battleships *Yamato* and *Yahagi*, as well as four destroyers, sunk for the loss of just ten Allied aircraft. This was the once-feared Japanese Imperial Navy's last desperate, and ultimately futile, major battle.

ROCKET-POWERED SUICIDE BOMBS

It was also on April 6 that the 7th and 9th divisions reached the main Japanese defence line, which spanned the width of the island from Machinato on the west coast, to Yonabaru on the east. This line was on high ground, the Kakazu Ridge, which was liberally studded with machine-guns and mortars and girded by barbed wire, anti-tank ditches, and minefields. Along the ridge the Japanese, as was now the norm, were holed up in caves, escarpments, blockhouses and pillboxes. Ushijima had prepared well for the final showdown.

By April 7, the 96th Division had pushed up to within 500 yards of the heavily defended ridge, which it attacked following a heavy preliminary bombardment by more than 300 artillery pieces as well as from the big guns of the fleet and 650 fighter-bomber sorties. The first two assaults on the 8th, on the hilly range which dominated the area of advance, were driven off, with six tanks being lost. This high ground did not appear to be much of an obstacle,

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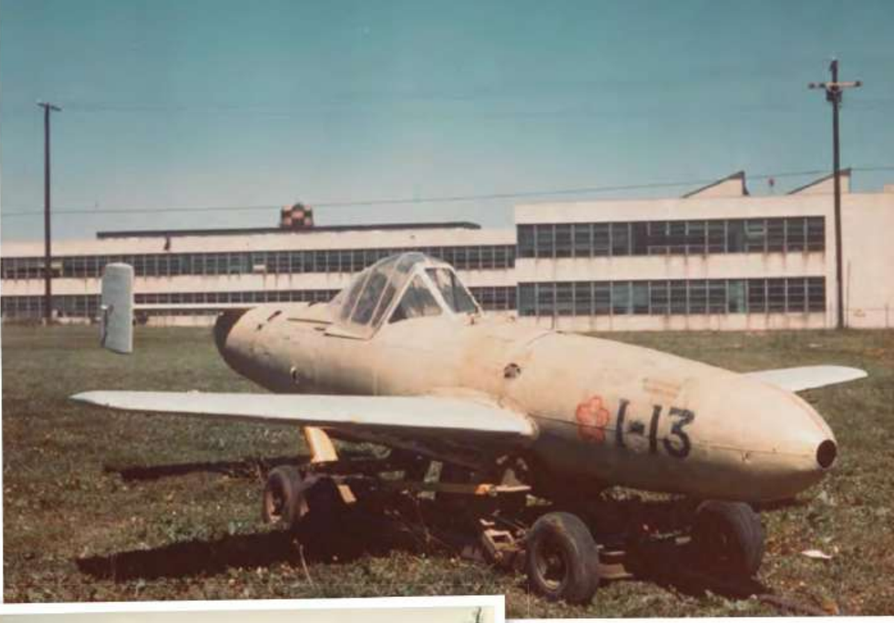
ABOVE LEFT: The battleship USS *Missouri* about to be hit by a Japanese A6M Zero kamikaze while operating off Okinawa on April 11, 1945. The aircraft struck the warship's hull below the main deck, causing only minor damage and no casualties. A 40mm quad gun mount's crew is in action in the lower foreground. (Historic Military Press)

ABOVE RIGHT: Reinforcements and supplies continue to pour ashore on one of the landing beaches on Okinawa, April 16, 1945. (NARA)

BELOW: A scene that displays the formidable resources wielded by the United States in the Pacific campaign – warships and craft of all types lie at anchor off one of the Okinawa landing beaches, April 13, 1945. (US Coastguard)

220
1000
220
1415
1265
49
104



RIGHT: An example of a Japanese Yokosuka MXY-7 Ohka which had been captured intact by US Marines on Okinawa. (USNHHC)

BELOW: A Doberman-Pinscher US Marine Corps' War Dog and his handler, Corporal Harold N Flagg, display a flag taken from a Japanese soldier. (USMC Archives)

but this "squat hump", as one veteran described it, was one of the keys of the Shuri defences. Attacks against the ridge continued for the next two days, with each assault being beaten back.

This was exactly the battle Ushijima had planned for, with the Americans sacrificing themselves on his well-planned defences. But remaining on the defensive rankled with his subordinates. The Japanese way was the banzai charge which would sweep all before it. Despite all the evidence from every encounter with the Americans, his officers demanded that they be allowed to attack. Ushijima, against his better judgement, gave in. He begrudgingly approved a six-battalion assault that would be carried out, on the night of April 12, in conjunction with another mass kamikaze raid.

The attack began in the early hours, with 185 kamikazes, accompanied by 150 fighters and forty-five torpedo bombers, aiming for the US fleet. With the attackers were eight bombers carrying a new weapon, the Yokosuka MXY-7 Ohka. This was a rocket-powered, human-guided kamikaze flying bomb packed with a ton of explosives.

The Ohkas were released from Mitsubishi G4M bombers and, at speeds of more than 500mph, sped towards the American warships. Just two found their targets. One slammed into the destroyer USS *Mannert L. Abele*, which had just been struck by a kamikaze aircraft. The ship broke in two and sank almost immediately. Another struck the destroyer USS *Stanly*. A further thirteen ships were hit by kamikazes.

The Japanese ground attack, though repeated on the following two nights, was predictably less successful, and Ushijima reverted to his proven defensive tactics. But there was one American death on April 12 that was hugely significant. That death occurred in Warm Springs, Georgia, for it was there, at 15.55 hours, that President Roosevelt died. The sad news was relayed to the soldiers and sailors fighting at Okinawa and received with disbelief and dismay. The man who had led the United States into the war with Japan would not witness the victory he had striven for since December 7, 1941.

ABOVE RIGHT: A US Marine watches a Sherman flamethrower tank in action during operations to clear Japanese positions on Okinawa in May 1945. (USMC Archives)

"I see no way to get them out but to blast them out yard by yard."

BELOW: Two Marines from the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, firing at Japanese defenders during the fighting on Wana Ridge, a long coral spine running out of northern Shuri Hill, in May 1945. (NARA)

The aircraft carrier USS *Bunker Hill* on fire after a kamikaze attack near Okinawa on May 11, 1945. The carrier had been hit by two Japanese aircraft in just 30 seconds. (Historic Military Press)

Men and machines of the US 6th Marine Division enter Naha, the capital of Okinawa, in May 1945. The scale of the destruction wrought on the city is evident. (USMC Archives)

HACKSAW RIDGE

That victory, to the men on Okinawa, seemed very distant. General Hodge made no pretence that the reduction of the Japanese defences was going to be anything but tough. "There are sixty-five to seventy thousand fighting Japs holed up in the south end of the island," he declared, "and I see no way to get them out but to blast them out yard by yard".[2] But after days of such efforts, little progress had been made and instead of this piecemeal approach, with the arrival of the 27th Division to supplement his numbers, he decided to mount a huge attack with his three divisions abreast to overwhelm the defenders in one go.

A total of 650 naval and army aircraft bombed the Japanese positions, whilst six battleships, six cruisers, and nine destroyers unleashed 19,000 rounds, before the infantry charged the ridge on the morning of April 19. Hidden in their caves deep within the hill-ridge complex, protected by walls of solid limestone, the Japanese simply waited for the fire to lift. When they emerged from their hideouts the defenders were able to fight off the Americans and little progress was made that day or the next. Hodge's men had no choice but to return to the gradual grind of taking one position at a time.

LEFT: Vought F4U Corsairs of the 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing about to hit Japanese positions on Okinawa, June 10, 1945. (USMC Archives)

Fresh impetus was given to the American advance through the arrival of the 77th Division which, from April 27, began to relieve the severely depleted ranks of the 96th Division. The 77th Division's first major objective was the capture of the Maeda Escarpment – which was known to the men as Hacksaw Ridge. Possession of the Maeda Escarpment was vital to Ushijima's defences because the terrain offered a commanding view of the whole of the Japanese positions as far as the foothills of Shuri.

The attack on the Maeda Escarpment was to lead to one of the greatest stories in military history which has, quite understandably, been the subject of a Hollywood blockbuster. The main character in this story is Private First Class Desmond Doss, a pacifist who, as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, refused to carry or use a weapon of any kind, but that did not stop him serving in the Army as a combat medic. On April 29, he was with the Medical Detachment of the 307th Regiment, when the 77th Infantry Division attacked the 400-foot high Maeda Escarpment. Doss' subsequent Medal of Honor citation tells the story well: "As our troops gained the summit, a heavy concentration of artillery, mortar and machinegun fire crashed into them, inflicting approximately 75 casualties and driving the others back. Private First Class Doss refused to seek cover and remained in the fire-swept area with the many stricken, carrying them one by one to the edge of the escarpment and there lowering them on a rope-supported litter down the face of a cliff to friendly hands.

"On 2 May, he exposed himself to heavy rifle and mortar fire in rescuing a wounded man 200 yards forward of the lines on the same escarpment; and two days later he treated four men who had been cut down while assaulting »

BELOW: A Japanese Zero kamikaze about to hit the water very near to USS *Essex* whilst the latter was operating off Okinawa on May 14, 1945. Note the plane's broken tail and the hole in the wing. (NARA)

LEFT: Lieutenant Colonel Richard P Ross Jr., of the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Division, plants the American flag on one of the remaining ramparts of ancient Shuri Castle on Okinawa, May 30, 1945. This flag was the same that the 1st Marine Division had raised at Cape Gloucester and on Peleliu. (USMC Archives)

Riflemen of the 305th Regiment, 77th Division, fire at Japanese troops occupying a cave dug in an escarpment southwest of Yuza, Okinawa, on June 20, 1945. (NARA)

TOP RIGHT: **A wounded Japanese soldier, captured after having been "blasted out of a cave on Mezado Ridge", is taken into captivity, June 17, 1945.** (National Museum of the US Navy)

BELOW: **The dedication ceremony of the 6th Marine Division Cemetery on Okinawa, July 4, 1945. In his eulogy at the time, US Navy Chaplain Paul Redmond said, "This is not a bivouac of the dead. It is a colony of heaven. And some part of us all is buried here."** (USMC Archives)

a strongly defended cave, advancing through a shower of grenades to within eight yards of enemy forces in a cave's mouth, where he dressed his comrades' wounds before making four separate trips under fire to evacuate them to safety.

"On 5 May, he unhesitatingly braved enemy shelling and small arms fire to assist an artillery officer. He applied bandages, moved his patient to a spot that offered protection from small-arms fire and, while artillery and mortar shells fell close by, painstakingly administered plasma. Later that day, when an American was severely wounded by fire from a cave, Private First Class Doss crawled to him where he had fallen 25 feet from the enemy position, rendered aid, and carried him 100 yards to safety while continually exposed to enemy fire."

Incredibly, Doss continued to expose himself to the fire of the Japanese as the days, and the battle, progressed. His exploits are almost too numerous to describe, and some had to be withheld during the making of the film *Hacksaw Ridge* because it was felt that audiences would not believe anyone could sacrifice themself in such a fashion. Astonishingly, though eventually wounded, he survived to receive his medal from Roosevelt's successor, President Truman.

The fighting continued into May and with the change of month came a change in the weather with the onset of the monsoons. The troops became bogged down, quite literally, in a morass of mud. The Americans, though, continued to advance until Ushijima was forced to withdraw to his final defensive line on the Kiyan Peninsula. It was there that the last drama would be played out.

In those last, fatal days of the Battle of Okinawa, the Marines had joined in the fighting in the form of the 1st, 2nd and 6th Marine divisions. The persistent pressure applied by the Americans had finally broken Ushijima's forces into disconnected groups which, though fighting to the death, were unable to present any form of coordinated resistance. On June 17, the Japanese were invited to surrender, with loudspeakers promising them humane treatment and leaflets being dropped by air on their positions. The appeals were ignored.

However, as the Japanese were driven to the end of the island, to the very water's edge, some of them did indeed surrender. Many others chose death, holding grenades against their stomachs, blowing themselves to pieces in what one author has described as "a kind of poor man's hara-kiri". Yet, for the first time in the Pacific War, large numbers – more than 7,000 – of Japanese did surrender, their belief in the Emperor and all he stood for having finally been eroded by defeat after defeat.

The battle for Okinawa officially ended on June 22. It was the bloodiest encounter of the war in the Pacific, with more than 240,000 being killed. Most of those who died were Okinawans – almost 150,000 in all. Large numbers of them had been used by the Japanese as human shields and were killed by the Americans who were unable to distinguish civilians from combat soldiers. Many others had been forced to commit suicide.

Despite the cost, the Allies had finally secured their base from which the invasion of the Japanese mainland could be launched. It was a prospect which filled all concerned with the utmost dread.

NOTES:

1. Quoted from James J Fahey, *Pacific War Diary: The Secret Diary of an American Sailor* (Mariner Books, New York, 2003).
2. Bill Sloan, *The Ultimate Battle, Okinawa 1945* (Simon & Schuster, London, 2007), p.131.

"THE END OF THE WORLD"

The Second World War was brought to a chilling conclusion with the release of the most destructive weapon in the history of human conflict – the atomic bomb.

On August 2, 1939, the renowned theoretical physicist Albert Einstein wrote a letter to President Roosevelt in which he declared that "it might become possible to set up a nuclear chain reaction in a large mass of uranium". He went on to declare that "extremely powerful bombs of a new type may thus be constructed". Shortly after the raid on Pearl Harbor, Congress allocated substantial funds to allow research to be undertaken to follow through on Einstein's idea and build an atomic bomb. Few, if any, could have imagined what they had agreed to support.

THE MANHATTAN PROJECT

The former boys' school, the Los Alamos Range School, thirty-five miles from Santa Fe, was purchased by the highly respected physicist J Robert Oppenheimer, along with almost 9,000 acres of surrounding land, in November 1942. There would be gathered some of the finest minds of their generation, to work on the creation of an atomic weapon under the top-secret mission codenamed the Manhattan Project.

While German and Japanese scientists also laboured unsuccessfully to create an atomic bomb, by the summer of 1945, Oppenheimer and his colleagues were ready to test their first weapon. As the clock ticked down to the detonation time of 05.30 hours on July 16, the nervous team of technicians and scientists waited ten miles away from 'Ground Zero' deep in the New Mexico desert. No one knew how powerful the explosion would be or whether even at such a distance they would be safe from the blast. Even so, Oppenheimer chose to observe the detonation from a point four miles nearer at the control bunker; but then no one was even sure that the bomb would work.

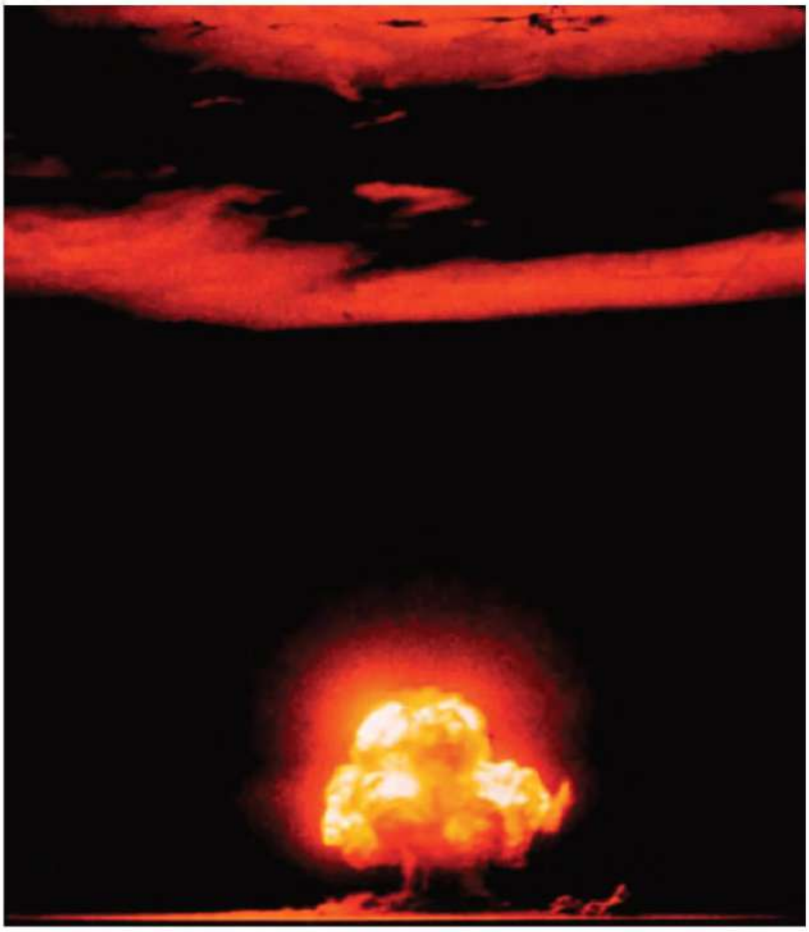
Exactly on time, a light so brilliant that the morning sky was illuminated for miles around, announced the dawn of the nuclear age. "The light of the first flash penetrated and came up from the ground through one's [eye]lids," one of those present at that epoch-making moment recalled. "When one first looked up, one saw the fireball, and then almost immediately afterwards, the unearthly hovering cloud." The blast was so powerful that windows were shattered in Silver City, more than 180 miles away. »

ABOVE: Three of the 509th Composite Group's Boeing B-29 Superfortress pictured before their mission to Hiroshima. From left to right they are *Big Stink*, *The Great Artiste*, and, nearest the camera, *Enola Gay*. (Courtesy of Harold Agnew)

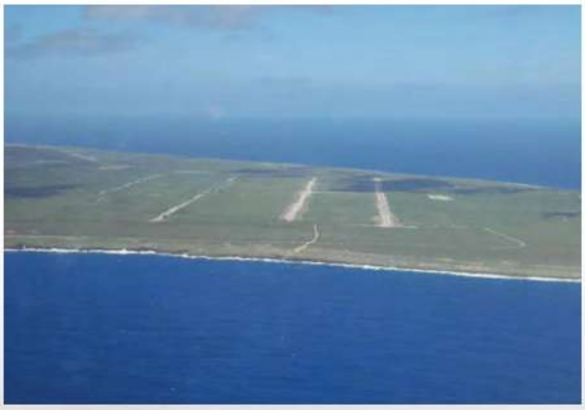
NORTH FIELD TINIAN ISLAND

The prospect of having to fight all the way into the very heart of Japan was a daunting one. No one doubted for a moment that casualties on both sides would be horrendous, and in Allied terms might even prove prohibitive. This was what Emperor Hirohito hoped for. Every citizen was to be armed and military training had become mandatory in Japanese schools. If the Allies invaded the Japanese mainland, they would not be fighting an army, they would be fighting an entire population – quite literally, a nation in arms.

So anxious were the Allied leaders to avoid such a bloodbath, even before the successful test in New Mexico, a secret cargo had been manoeuvred into the hangar deck of the heavy cruiser USS *Indianapolis*. Captain Charles McVay, like the rest of his crew, knew nothing of the contents of the fifteen-foot crate. His instructions were simply to deliver the cargo to the island of Tinian in the Northern Marianas, via Pearl Harbor, as quickly as possible. In the crate, accompanied by two scientists from the Manhattan Project and guarded by a party of marines, was the bomb with the codename *Little Boy*. The plutonium core of a second bomb – *Fat Man* – would also soon be on its way across the Pacific to Tinian, though in this instance by aircraft.



RIGHT: Taken by Jack W Aeby, an environmental physicist, this image is the only well-exposed colour photograph of the first ever detonation of a nuclear weapon – an event which occurred at the Trinity test site in New Mexico on July 16, 1945. At Truman's behest, the test was carried out prior to the Potsdam Conference, which opened the following day.



BELOW: An aerial view of North Field, Tinian, showing the four runways built for the B-29 Superfortresses. From left to right, these are Delta, Charlie, Baker and Able. A little to the right of Able can be seen a white patch. This is where the pits for the two nuclear bombs are located and where they were loaded into the bomb bays of *Enola Gay* and *Bockscar*. (John Grehan Collection)

In May 1945, the four bombardment groups of the 313th Bombardment Wing were joined by a fifth which was scheduled to undertake an unstated special operation. This, the 509th Composite Group, was commanded by Colonel Paul W Tibbets.

ENOLA GAY

A little after 02.30 hours on the morning of August 6, Colonel Tibbets lifted off from Tinian's North Field, more specifically runway 'Able', in the B-29 that he had repainted from its simple number 82 to bear the name of his 54-year-old mother, Enola Gay. In its bomb bay was the uranium gun-type bomb *Little Boy* that the USS *Indianapolis* had safely delivered to the tiny Mariana island. In addition to the standard crew on board *Enola Gay* was US Navy Captain William S Parsons, who, as the Technical Control Officer, had to arm *Little Boy* in flight.

Accompanying *Enola Gay* that morning were three other B-29s. *The Great Artiste* carried equipment that would measure the extent and power

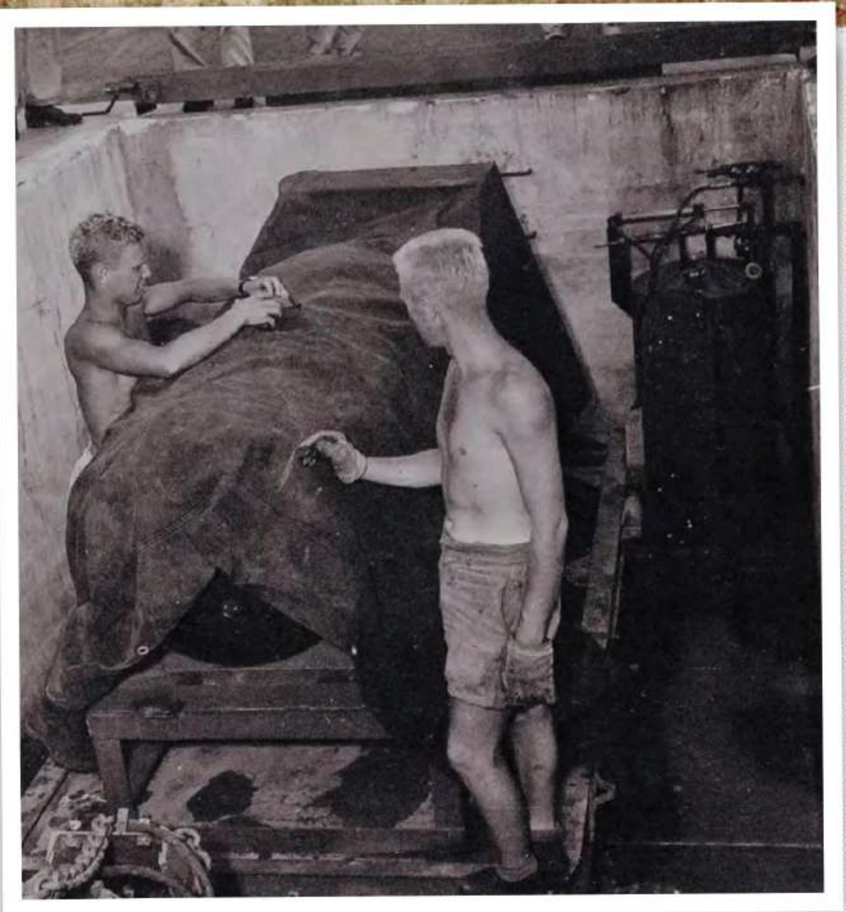
BELOW: USS *Indianapolis*, in the centre, pictured off Tinian circa July 1945, at the time she made her atomic delivery to the island. (USNHHC)

of the blast, an unnamed plane, No.91 (later called *Necessary Evil*), which was to observe and photograph the explosion, and the third, also unnamed (No.72), that was a spare machine in case *Enola Gay* could not complete its mission. When it was evident that Tibbets' aircraft was functioning well, No.72 aborted and landed at Iwo Jima.

Three other aircraft had set off ahead of *Enola Gay* to report on the weather over the primary target, the city of Hiroshima, and two secondary targets, Kokura and Nagasaki. These places were considered military targets, but Hiroshima and Kokura had been left largely untouched by earlier bombing raids so that the effects of the atomic blast could be gauged. Nagasaki had suffered several small raids.

Shortly after 07.00 hours, the weather aircraft *Straight Flush* reached Hiroshima and reported back: "Cloud cover less than 3/10th at all altitudes. Advice: bomb primary." With that simple message, Hiroshima's fate was sealed.

The three B-29s flew independently to Hiroshima in order to prevent the Japanese despatching fighters to intercept them. What threat could be posed by a single aircraft? The three bombers duly rendezvoused over Hiroshima and at 08.09 hours Tibbets started on the most famous bombing run in history. Just six minutes later *Little Boy* was released; 44.4 seconds later it exploded.



LEFT: A canvas cover is removed from *Little Boy* in No.1 Bomb Loading Pit on Tinian. The bomb weighed about 9,000lbs and had a yield equivalent to approximately 20,000 tons of high explosive. (National Museum of the US Navy)

"LOOK AT THAT"

"We turned back to look at Hiroshima," Tibbets later recalled. "The city was hidden by that awful cloud… boiling up, mushrooming, terrible and incredibly tall. No one spoke for a moment; then everyone was talking. I remember [co-pilot Robert] Lewis pounding my shoulder, saying: 'Look at that! Look at that! Look at that!' [Bombardier] Tom Ferebee wondered about whether radioactivity would make us all sterile. Lewis said he could taste atomic fission. He said it tasted like lead."

Captain Theodore van Kirk was *Enola Gay*'s navigator. "[It was] very much as if you've ever sat on an ash can and had somebody hit it with a baseball bat", he once recounted. "The plane bounced, it jumped and there was a noise like a piece of sheet metal snapping. Those of us who had flown quite a bit over Europe thought that it was anti-aircraft fire that had exploded very close to the plane."

Looking back at the explosion he remarked: "I don't believe anyone ever expected to look at a sight quite like that. Where we had seen a clear city two minutes before, we could now no longer see the city. We could see smoke and fires creeping up the sides of the mountains."

Staff Sergeant Robert Caron was Tibbets' rear-gunner: "The mushroom itself was a spectacular sight, a bubbling mass of purple-gray smoke and you could see it had a red core in it and everything was burning inside. As we got farther away, we could see the base of the mushroom and below we could see what looked like a few-hundred-foot layer of debris and smoke and what have you… I saw fires springing up in different places, like flames shooting up on a bed of coals."[1]

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Dr Michihiko Hachiya, Director of the Hiroshima Communications Hospital, was sprawled on his living room floor having worked all night at the hospital as an air raid warden. "Suddenly, a strong flash of light startled me – and

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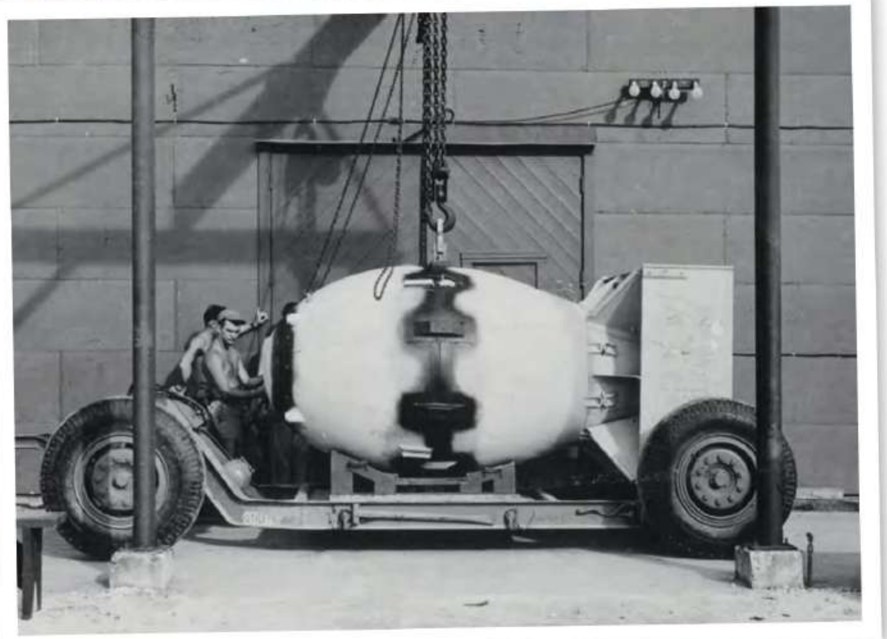
BELOW LEFT: A closer view of No.1 Bomb Loading Pit which, today covered by a protective roof, was used to house *Little Boy*. (John Grehan Collection)

BELOW RIGHT: The loading area for the two nuclear bombs at North Field, Tinian. In the distance can be seen No.1 Bomb Loading Pit. (John Grehan Collection)



TOP LEFT: Runway Able, of North Field, Tinian, from where both *Enola Gay* and *Bockscar* lifted off on their historic flights to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (John Grehan Collection)

TOP RIGHT: Bomb Loading Pit No.2, where *Fat Man* was stored and loaded onto *Bockscar. Fat Man* had to be armed before it was loaded into the B-29's bomb bay which meant that it was 'live' for the entire flight and once airborne the bomb could not be brought back. (John Grehan Collection)

RIGHT: *Fat Man* on its transport carriage on Tinian Island following its final assembly in preparation for its use against Japan. In keeping with its name, *Fat Man* was more than twice as wide as *Little Boy* which was dropped on Hiroshima. (NARA)

then another. So well does one recall little things that I remember vividly how a stone lantern in the garden became brilliantly lit and I debated whether this light was caused by a magnesium flare or sparks from a passing trolley.

"Garden shadows disappeared. The view where a moment before had been so bright and sunny was now dark and hazy. Through swirling dust, I could barely discern a wooden column that had supported one comer of my house. It was leaning crazily and the roof sagged dangerously.

"Moving instinctively, I tried to escape, but rubble and fallen timbers barred the way. By picking my way cautiously I managed to reach the roka [an outside hallway] and stepped down into my garden. A profound weakness overcame me, so I stopped to regain my strength. To my surprise I discovered that I was completely naked. How odd! Where were my drawers and undershirt? What had happened?

"All over the right side of my body I was cut and bleeding. A large splinter was protruding from a mangled wound in my thigh, and something warm trickled into my mouth. My check was torn, I discovered as I felt it gingerly, with the lower lip laid wide open. Embedded in my neck was a sizable fragment of glass."

Looking down the length of Runway Able – the same view, bar the encroaching vegetation, that Tibbets and Sweeney would have had as they powered up their engines at the start of their long take-off. (John Grehan Collection)

Though only about a mile from the epicentre of the explosion, both he and his wife survived the blast. Still dazed and unsure of exactly what had happened, the couple tried to make their way to the hospital.

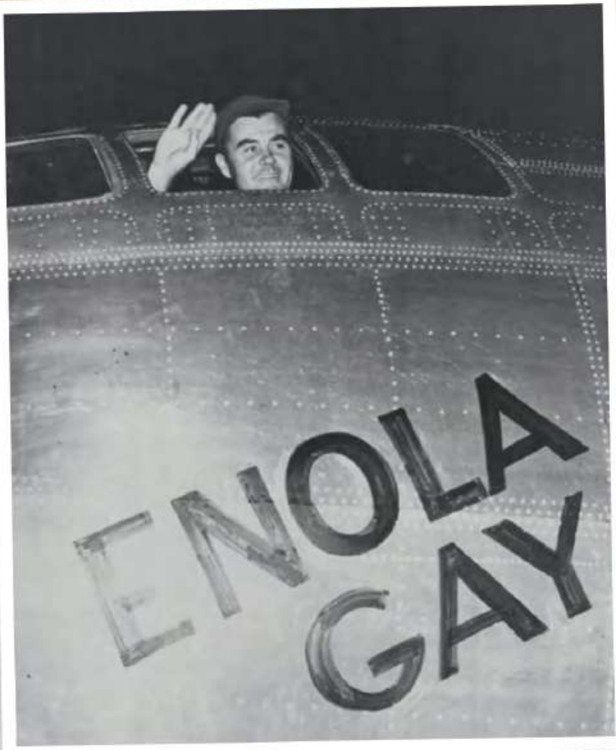
"Gradually things around me came into focus. There were the shadowy forms of people, some of whom looked like walking ghosts. Others moved as though in pain, like scarecrows, their arms held out from their bodies with forearms and hands dangling. These people puzzled me until I suddenly realized that they had been burned and were holding their arms out to prevent the painful friction of raw surfaces rubbing together. A naked woman carrying a naked baby came into view. I averted my gaze. Perhaps they had been in the bath. But then I saw a naked man, and it occurred to me that, like myself, some strange thing had deprived them of their clothes… Indeed, one thing was common to everyone I saw – complete silence."[2]

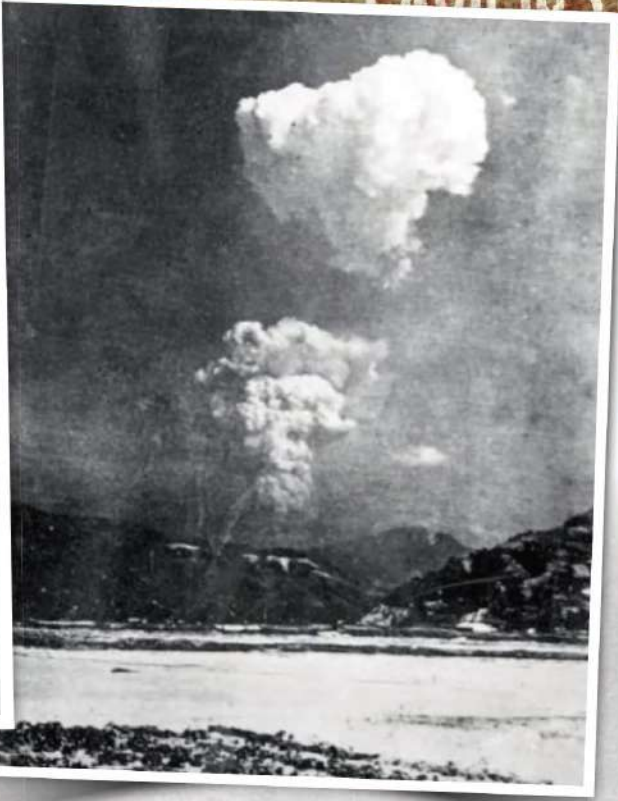
Between 70,000 and 80,000 people were killed and a similar number were injured. Around five square miles of the city were destroyed.

"AN OVERWHELMING SUCCESS"

Recently installed as president after the death of Roosevelt, Harry S Truman was in the mess deck of the USS *Augusta*, returning from the Potsdam Conference where he had met with Stalin, Churchill, and the newly-installed British Prime Minister, the Labour Party's Clement Atlee, when he received news of the successful attack upon Hiroshima. The president leapt to his feet and, following their commander-in-chief, those around him also began to stand up. "Please keep your seats and listen for a moment," he told the men. "I have an announcement to make. We have just dropped a new bomb on Japan which has more power than twenty thousand tons of TNT. It has been an overwhelming success!"

The response in Tokyo was one of confusion. Communications with Hiroshima had been abruptly severed. No one in the imperial capital knew what had happened so a young officer was despatched to investigate. He flew over the city, reporting back that: "Practically all living things, human and animal, were literally seared to death."





FAR LEFT: Colonel Paul W Tibbets Jr., the commander of the 509th Composite Group, and pilot of *Enola Gay*, waves from his cockpit just moments before taking off for the flight to Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. (NARA)

LEFT: Found archived away in an elementary school in Honkawa in 2013, this picture is believed to show the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima some thirty 30 minutes after detonation of *Little Boy*, as seen from a location about six miles east of the hypocentre. (Honkawa Elementary School)

"The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East."

MIDDLE: One of the USAAF's 509th Composite Group's B-29s pictured in the air – note the temporary triangle 'N' tail marking indicating that the aircraft is carrying a nuclear weapon. (National Museum of the US Air Force)

It was not until 19.50 hours that Hirohito was informed that Hiroshima had been attacked by "a special bomb" and that most of the city had ceased to exist. The emperor made no comment. As the hours ticked by, Hirohito maintained his silence.

What was now absolutely vital was that the Allies demonstrated that *Little Boy* was not a one-off – it was the first of an endless stream of bombs that would be dropped on Japan until she surrendered. As part of this, shortly after the first bomb had been detonated President Truman broadcast a statement which explained to the world what had just happened – and which included a chilling message for Japan's rulers: "It is an atomic bomb. It is a harnessing of the basic power of the universe. The force from which the sun draws its power has been loosed against those who brought war to the Far East… If they do not now accept our terms, they may expect a rain of ruin from the air the like of which has never been seen on this earth."[3]

The Americans, meanwhile, pushed on with the preparations to release their second atomic weapon upon Japan. This time the British, who had played such an important part in the development of the atomic bomb, were to participate.

THE END OF THE WORLD

During the early hours of August 9, that second atomic bomb, *Fat Man*, was loaded on board Major Charles Sweeney's B-29, which he had nicknamed *Bockscar*. The third of the five bombers tasked to the mission, the B-29 named *Big Stink*, and which had Major James Hopkins at the controls, was airborne four minutes later.

Onboard *Big Stink*, alongside Hopkins and his nine-man crew, were two British observers, Group Captain Leonard Cheshire and Professor William Penny. A physicist, Penny had been part of the Manhattan Project that developed the atomic bomb and knew as much, if not more, about the devices than anyone then alive. He was on the mission to report on the technical aspects of deploying the weapon. Cheshire's job, meanwhile, was to examine the tactical issues involved in dropping the bomb onto the target. Penny was on his first ever operational flight; Cheshire was on his 103rd and last.

Unlike the smooth run *Enola Gay* experienced on the 6th, almost everything went wrong with this second mission. Firstly, the pump on *Bockscar*'s reserve fuel tank was found to be inoperative. To replace the pump would take hours, so Sweeney had to take off knowing that he could not access his reserve fuel and his

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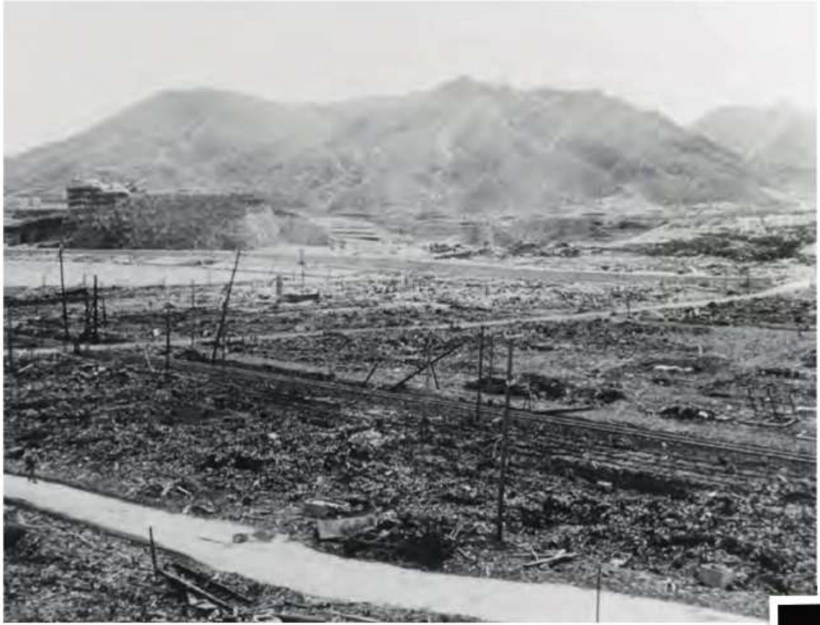
BELOW: A Japanese soldier walks through the atomic bomb levelled city of Hiroshima in September 1945. (USNHHC)



RIGHT: The destruction of Nagasaki as it appeared in September 1945. This view is of the area very close to ground zero. About one-third of Nagasaki City was destroyed in the explosion and 150,000 people were killed or injured. It was reputedly said at the time that the area would be devoid of vegetation for seventy-five years. (USNHHC)

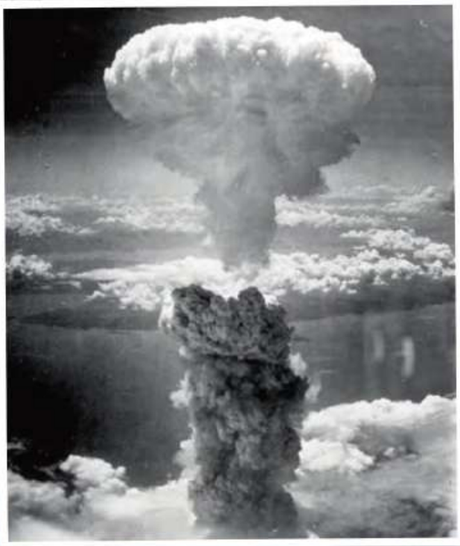
margin for error had been enormously reduced. He would also have to carry all that heavy unusable fuel all the way to Japan and back.

Then, when he reached the point where he was to rendezvous with the instrument plane and the observation plane, the latter was nowhere to be seen. Sweeney circled round for forty-five minutes before continuing with *The Great Artiste* to the primary target, Kokura. He knew that he did not have enough fuel left to reach either Tinian or Iwo Jima on his return. His only option was to try and make it to Okinawa which had only been fully secured by US forces a few weeks earlier.

Bockscar arrived over Kokura only to find the ancient city obscured by smoke and clouds. As per his instructions, Sweeney turned his Superfortress to the secondary target, Nagasaki. Less than one minute past 11.00 hours *Fat Man* exploded over that unfortunate city.

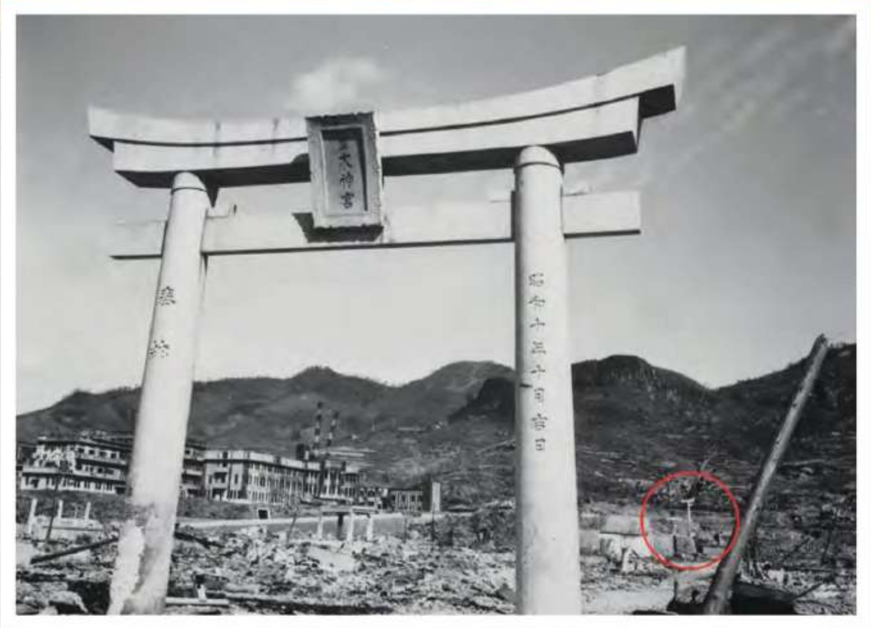
Dr Aidan MacCarthy, from Cork, who had been a prisoner of the Japanese since the fall of Singapore in 1942, was incarcerated in a prison camp near the Mitsubishi factory in Nagasaki. He and his fellow prisoners were working outside that morning when they spotted the two B-29s overhead. Most of the PoWs rushed for the air raid shelters, though a couple of them merely hid by the side of the barracks hut. "They were gazing at the sky, watching the approaching vapour trails," MacCarthy later wrote. "One of them shouted to us that three small parachutes had dropped.

"There then followed a blue flash, accompanied by a very bright magnesium-type flare which blinded them. Then came a frighteningly loud but rather flat explosion which was followed by a blast of hot air. Some of this could be felt, even by us, as it came through the shelter openings, which were very rarely closed owing to the poor ventilation. The explosions we heard seemed to be two in number…



RIGHT: The mushroom cloud grows over Nagasaki, rising some 60,000 feet into the air, after *Fat Man* was dropped and exploded on August 9, 1945. (NARA)

BELOW: In 1968, a memorial monolith was erected to mark the hypocentre of the atomic explosion at Nagasaki. The surrounding peace park, laid out in 1955 on a low hill to the immediate north of the hypocentre, contains other reminders of the events of August 9, 1945. These include a small section of the walls of the Urakami Cathedral, at the time the largest Catholic Church in East Asia, and an area laid out with the remains of destroyed houses – roof tiles, bricks, ceramic and pieces of glass that boiled in the 3,000°C atomic heat. (Chanawin Tepprasitsakda/Shutterstock)



LEFT: All that was left of the Sannō Shrine in Nagasaki after the detonation of *Fat Man*. The object in the red circle can still be seen in situ today and is the remains of a *torii*, a traditional wood or stone Japanese gateway. One of the two pillars of the *torii* was blown away, but the rest of the structure remained standing. (NARA)

MIDDLE LEFT: Another view of the ruins of the Sannō Shrine in Nagasaki that was taken on September 24, 1945 *Fat Man* exploded above Nagasaki's industrial valley – roughly halfway between the Mitsubishi Steel and Arms Works in the south and the Mitsubishi-Urakami Ordnance Works (a torpedo factory) in the north. This was nearly two miles north-west of the intended hypocentre. The remains of the *torii* can be seen once again on the right. (NARA)

"All this was followed by eerie silence. Then an Australian PoW stuck his head out of the shelter opening, looked around and ducked back in, his face expressing incredulity. This brought the rest of us scrambling to our feet and a panic rush to the exits. The sight that greeted us halted us in our tracks.

"As we slowly surveyed the scene around us, we became aware that the camp had to all intents and purposes disappeared. Mostly of wooden construction, the wood had carbonized and turned to ashes. Bodies lay everywhere, some horribly mutilated by falling walls, girders and flying glass. There were outbreaks of fire in all directions, with loud explosions recurring as the flapping, live electric cables fused and flared. The gas mains had also exploded, and those people still on their feet ran round in circles, hands pressed to their blinded eyes or holding the flesh that hung in tatters from their faces or arms.

"The brick built guardroom had collapsed, and the dead guards lay almost naked. We could suddenly see right up the length of the valley, where previously the factories and buildings had formed a screen. Left behind was a crazy forest of discoloured corrugated sheets clinging to twisted girders… But most frightening of all was the lack of sunlight in contrast to the bright August sunshine that we had left a few minutes earlier, there was now a kind of twilight. We all genuinely thought, for some time, that this was the end of the world."[4]

"TEN MILLION DEGREES OF HEAT"

Having missed the rendezvous, *Big Stink* was many miles away when *Fat Man* detonated. Despite this, Cheshire still had a clear view of events some fifty miles away to starboard.

"Suddenly it was there," he subsequently recalled, describing the moment that *Fat Man* exploded at a height of 1,840 feet with a force equivalent to 22,000 tons of TNT. "At the time of the explosion we were wearing welders' Polaroid glasses. They were so dark that even the tropical sun shone through them as nothing more than a vague pinpoint of light. Even then the explosion, when eventually it came, was so bright that it had the same effect as if night had been turned into day.

"Two seconds later, when it was safe to take off our glasses, we looked out towards the target and saw a vast ball of fire. It was about 2,000 feet in the air and half-a-mile in diameter. This fire, which generated almost ten million degrees of heat, began rocketing up to the heavens at a speed of something like 20,000 feet per minute. After fifteen seconds the flame had died out and turned into a cloud. Exactly what that cloud looked like I do not suppose any words will ever describe. It was unlike any other phenomenon the world has ever seen; it was possessed of some diabolical activity as though it were a horrible form of life.

"Its heat was so great that even at a range of twenty miles we could see the dust from the earth being sucked up into the air like a vortex. The cloud rose to a height of sixty thousand feet in less than five minutes and there it stayed.

"On flying close to it we saw that its colour was a sort of luminous yellow, like sulphur. Throughout the whole time it remained a boiling, turbulent mass and continued expanding until it reached some two miles across."[5]

As with Hiroshima three days earlier, Nagasaki had been devastated; nearly half of the city had been blasted into ruin. As one historian Morris graphically wrote, comingled within that seething cloud were "vaporized metals, steam from boiled-out canals, carbonized trees, particles of factories and roasted homes, and the soot of 40,000 souls".[6]

BELOW: Perhaps the best known, and most recognisable, reminder of the dropping of the atomic bombs in August 1945 is the remains of what is now referred to as the 'Atomic Bomb Dome' in Hiroshima. (Nero Lee/ Shutterstock)

NOTES:

1. Quoted from www.atomicheritage.org.
2. Michihiko Hachiya, *Hiroshima Diary: The Journal of a Japanese Physician, August 6-September 30, 1945* (University of North Carolina Press, 1955), pp.1-4.
3. Leonard Cheshire, *Light of Many Suns: The Meaning of the Bomb* (Methuen, London, 1985) p.29.
4. *The Irish Times*, August 9, 2015.
5. Leonard Cheshire VC, *The Face of Victory* (Hutchinson, London, 1961), p.51.
6. Richard Morris, *Cheshire: The Biography of Leonard Cheshire VC OM* (Chivers Press, Bath, 2000), p.316.

STALIN STRIKES

The desperate situation that the Japanese found themselves in deepened on August 9, 1945, when the Soviets launched the last Allied campaign of the Second World War.

BELOW: US and Soviet sailors celebrating victory on August 10, 1945, after a premature report of Japan's surrender was received at their Alaskan base. Only the day before, Stalin had unleashed his forces in the Far East. (USNHHC)

Late on Wednesday, August 8, 1945, the Japanese ambassador in Moscow, Naotake Satō, was requested to attend the Kremlin for an audience with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov. Rather than receiving news on the continuing Japanese attempts to negotiate terms with the United States and its allies through Moscow, which Stalin had been skilfully deflecting for some time, Satō was presented with some devastating information – from the following day the USSR would consider itself to be at war with Japan.

While this move by Stalin unilaterally terminated the Neutrality Pact that had existed between the two countries since it was signed on April 13, 1941, it was a decision that had been announced to the Western allies months earlier, even as far back as a promise made to Roosevelt and Churchill at the Tehran Conference in November 1943. Indeed, the declaration handed to Satō indicated that "the Soviet Government [had] decided to accept the proposition of the Allies and joined the [Potsdam] declaration of the Allied Powers of July 26".

THE LAST CAMPAIGN

The Russian preparations for their Manchurian campaign were extensive. The massive regrouping of forces to the east began in May 1945 and continued virtually uninterrupted through into August. The distances involved were staggering, the new front being some 10,000 or so kilometres from the fighting in Europe, this being from where most of the required men and materiel were drawn. To achieve the move, the Soviets used 136,000 railway carriages and wagons; in June and July, as many as 30 trains used the Trans-Siberian railroad each day.[1]

In agreeing to move against the Empire of Japan, Stalin had promised Washington and London that he would do so within three months of Germany's defeat in Europe, which, to the Russians, had occurred in the early hours of May 9. It was a deadline that the Soviet leader characteristically pushed to the limit.

Consequently, it was at exactly one minute past midnight (Trans-Baikal time) on August 9, 1945, that the Red Army struck in what was the last military campaign to be launched in the Second World War. A few hours later, the second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

The plan drawn up by the commander of the Soviet Far East Command, Marshal of the Soviet Union Aleksandr Mikhaylovich Vasilevsky, was relatively simple, involving a classic pincer movement

in which the Japanese forces would be attacked on three fronts to the east, west and north of Manchuria. Simple though the Russian plan might have been, the scale was vast – not least in terms of territory, for the offensive involved an area the size of the entire Western Front in Europe.

Likewise, the Soviet assault parties that crossed the Soviet-Manchurian border early on that Wednesday morning, without any preceding aerial or artillery bombardment, were just the initial vanguard of a force of more than 1.5 million men. As the author Max Hastings reveals, those advance units were followed by, "Infantry, tank formations, trotting columns of horsed cavalry and mounted infantry, supported by river flotillas, air fleets, [and] guns in tens of thousands. Assault operations extended across land and water fronts of 2,730 miles, from the Mongolian desert in the west to the densely-forested coast of the Sea of Japan."[2]

Opposing Vasilevsky's men was the Japanese Kwantung Army, which, commanded by General Yamada Otozo, was supported by Manchukuoan and Inner Mongolian auxiliaries. Despite being the largest army group of the Imperial Japanese Army from 1919 to 1945, and once viewed as one of the Emperor's elite formations, the Kwantung Army, proved incapable of countering the Soviet offensive, which, itself, can be divided into two distinct phases.

The first part was the initial week from August 9, a period in which the overpowering Red Army literally swept aside the Japanese defenders. Equipped with 3,704 tanks and 1,852 self-propelled guns, the Russians enjoyed a superiority of two to one in men, five to one in tanks and artillery, and two to one in aircraft.[3]

The fact that roughly one third of the Soviet troops were battle-hardened veterans was equally as important. "At every level in every sector," wrote David Glantz, the "Soviet commanders in Manchuria took great risks, planned bold operations, and executed their plans with abandon. They demonstrated a flexibility exceeding that displayed in earlier operations, not only because of the particular demands in the theater of operations, but also because Soviet military leadership had matured.

"The war had produced a generation of experienced and competent army, corps, division, regimental, and brigade commanders, whose expertise was the product of up to four years of battle. This generation realized that the Manchurian operation was probably the last campaign of a long war, hence a campaign that had to be successful and short. The will to achieve peace provided the impetus for this last violent spasm of war. Soviet forces were surgical in their conduct of battle."[4]

In many cases, the speed of their advance even surpassed the Soviet commanders' own expectations. The 6th Guards Tank Army, for example, covered some 220 miles over difficult terrain in just three days, giving the Japanese no time or opportunity to mount a resilient and effective defence – though it was the case that some elements of the Kwantung Army put up a spirited fight when given the opportunity. As the Soviets rolled on, however, it was not the enemy that began to limit the advance, but their own logistical difficulties.

LEFT: Red Army troops in the streets of Maoko soon after its capture by Stalin's forces. A force of Soviet Marines and men of the 113th Infantry Brigade landed in Maoka on August 20, 1945, capturing the port town after a period of fierce fighting. It was renamed Kholmsk in 1946. (via Historic Military Press)

BELOW: General Tsutsumi Fusaki, the commander of the Japanese 91st Division on Shumshu, pictured on a tank with members of his staff in June 1945. (via Historic Military Press)

SURRENDER

To many historians, the second phase of Stalin's offensive began on August 15, the day that Emperor Hirohito made his decision to confirm Japan's acceptance of the Potsdam Proclamation. "Applying the brakes to the Soviet offensive…", notes the author Mark Ealey, "proved no easy matter. After some confusion among the Kwantung Army commanders over communication from Tokyo regarding Japan's capitulation, General Yamada sent a telegram to Marshal Vasilevsky's headquarters on August 17 offering a ceasefire."[5] This, though, was bluntly

»

LEFT: Captured Japanese tanks on Shumshu after the surrender of the Japanese 91st Division. (via Historic Military Press)

BELOW: **Japanese prisoners of war returning from Siberia, where they had been held since their capture in 1945, wait to disembark from a ship at Maizuru, Kyoto Prefecture, Japan on January 2, 1946.** (via Historic Military Press)

" Soviet forces were surgical in their conduct of battle."

RIGHT: **A Japanese Type 97 Chi-Ha medium tank that can still be seen on the Shumshu battlefield.** (Andrey Filonov/ Shutterstock)

BELOW: **The remains of a typical Japanese bunker, constructed predominantly from timber, that has survived on the island of Shumshu.** (Keith Michael Taylor/ Shutterstock)

rejected. For the time being, Stalin's forces would forge ahead with their offensive, all the while bringing more territory under their control.

On August 18, Yamada's chief-of-staff travelled to Marshal Vasilevsky's HQ to personally offer a surrender. But still the Russians prevaricated. On the same day they carried out a series of landings behind the Japanese lines. Three of these took place in northern Korea, one in South Sakhalin (a Japanese prefecture since 1907), and a fifth on the island of Shumshu, the second-northernmost island of the Kuril Islands chain.

Faced with a sudden pre-dawn assault, the Japanese 91st Division on Shumshu defended its positions fiercely, only surrendering after several days of heavy fighting. The loss of the Kuril Islands meant that Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido was now within easy striking distance of the Russian forces. Well over 1,000 Soviet troops, and half that number of Japanese, were killed in what is often referred to as the last land battle of the Second World War.

Satisfied that Soviet sovereignty had been established across a wide expanse of what had been Japanese-held territory, Marshal Vasilevsky finally agreed to a ceasefire on the 19th, the orders for which were duly transmitted by the Kwantung Army's HQ to its remaining units throughout Manchuria. Even then, fighting in some areas continued sporadically for several days.

The state of war between Russia and Japan continued until 1956, when it was ended by a Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration that was signed on October 19. As well as providing for the end of the state of war and the restoration of diplomatic relations between USSR and Japan, the declaration also stipulated that negotiations for a formal peace treaty would continue.

Primarily because of territorial disagreements, to date no formal peace treaty has been signed between the two nations.

NOTES:

1. See David M. Glantz, "August Storm", Leavenworth Papers, No.7, US Army Command and General Staff College, February 1983.
2. Max Hastings, *Nemesis: The Battle for Japan, 1944-45* (Harper, London, 2008), p.525.
3. ibid, p.530.
4. David M. Glantz, op cit.
5. Mark Ealey, "An August Storm", *Asia-Pacific Journal*, Issue 2, Volume 4, February 2006.

There has been much debate over the decades whether it was the dropping of the atomic bombs or the invasion of Manchuria by the Soviets that compelled the Japanese emperor to accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration in which the Allied leaders called for Japan's unconditional surrender. Though both sides of the argument offer compelling theories, in reality it was the combination of both of these factors which forced the Japanese to submit. It was, though, the appearance of the atomic bomb, something entirely new in warfare, which to some degree helped the Japanese leadership to feel that they had not been defeated by conventional means but by something with which they could not compete. It helped them save face – their honour – a factor enormously important to them, even though many of them committed suicide (another honourable act in their eyes) once they had agreed to surrender.

The six-man Supreme Council for the Direction of the War had been evenly split on the decision to surrender or fight on in the hope that the prospect of invading Japan would be too costly for the Allies to contemplate. While it might be the case that in light of the horrific casualties suffered by the Americans at Iwo Jima and Okinawa the Western Allies would baulk at the thought of further fighting on Japanese soil, the Soviets in their struggle against the Germans had demonstrated that they could be as barbaric as any of their opponents and would not flinch at invading Japan.

So, with the Supreme Council split, Prime Minister Admiral Kantarō Suzuki asked the Emperor to decide. "I have given serious thought to the situation prevailing at home and abroad," Hirohito answered, "and have concluded that continuing the war can only mean destruction for the nation and prolongation of bloodshed and cruelty in the world. I cannot bear to see my innocent people suffer any longer."

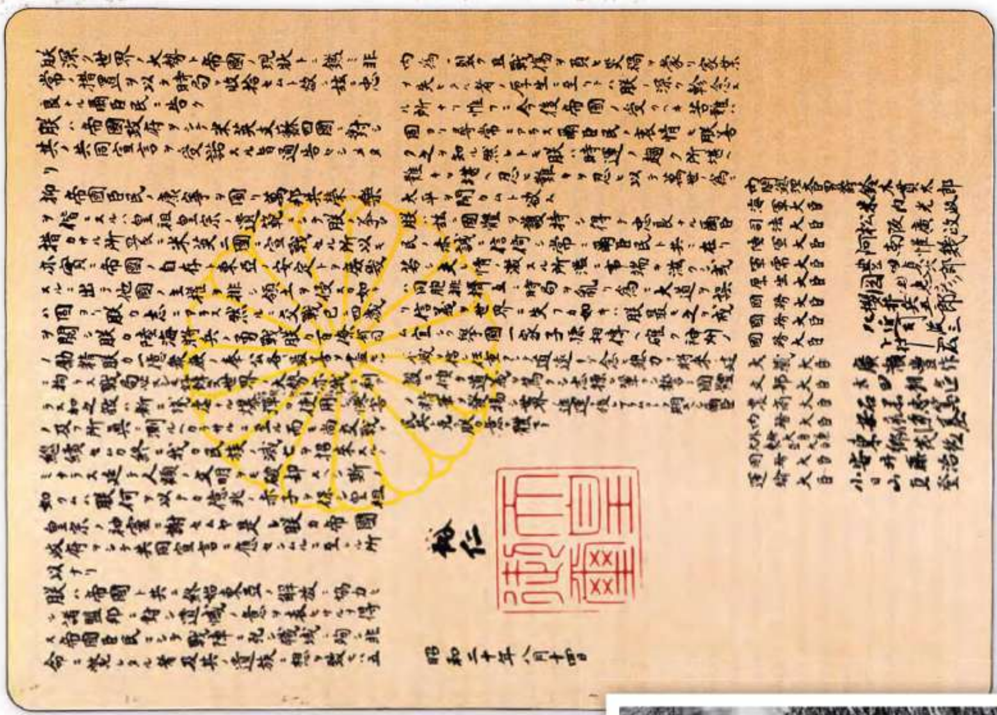
The die was cast. The Emperor had spoken. Japanese embassies in Switzerland and Sweden were advised to accept the Allied terms of surrender and these transmissions were picked up by the Americans, the White House being informed of this just before 03.00 hours on the morning of August 14.

Nevertheless, many in the Japanese military, particularly among the junior officers, wanted to fight on regardless, and when they learned that Hirohito was going to accept the Potsdam Declaration, they decided to take matters into their own hands. The Emperor had told the Supreme Council that he was willing to make a live announcement to tell his people that Japan was going to surrender, and those officers opposed to this intended to stop Hirohito from delivering his broadcast. »

SURRENDER

At the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, the Allied leaders called for the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Empire or suffer "prompt and utter destruction". With such destruction imminent, Emperor Hirohito had to accept that the war was over.

BELOW: A view of part of the Imperial Palace in Tokyo where Hirohito recorded his surrender speech. The primary residence of the Emperor of Japan, the Palace is a large park-like area located in the Chiyoda ward of Tokyo and contains buildings including the main palace, various private residences and administration buildings. (Robert Cicchetti/Shutterstock)



ABOVE: **The script of Emperor Hirohito's surrender speech printed on a single card.** (Courtesy of the US Army Center of Military History)

THE RECORDING

Rather than making a live broadcast, Hirohito was advised to pre-record his announcement. The Emperor was regarded as being infallible and it would be 'unimaginable' if he stuttered or made a mistake. So, at 23.00 hours on the evening of August 14, 1945, the Emperor sat down in his bunker in the grounds of the Imperial Palace to record one of the most fateful broadcasts in Japanese history. It was to be recorded twice onto discs and, in case Hirohito stumbled over his words, the recording team from HNK, Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai, Japan's national broadcasting organisation, brought with them sixty blank discs.

As it transpired, in his first ever recording, Hirohito read his prepared message flawlessly. A second recording was made, but the first one was judged the best and was the one that would be used. On both occasions, two recording machines were used.

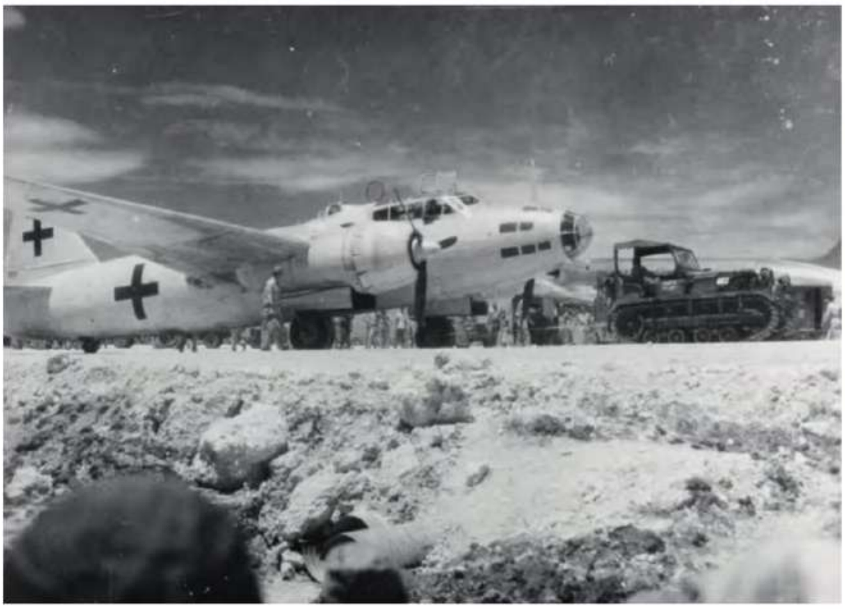
When it was time for the recording team to leave the palace an air raid was in progress, so rather than run the risk of transporting the discs to the NHK building in the middle of a heavy bombardment, they were deposited in a small safe hidden behind a pile of papers – just in case. Opposition to the surrender was well known and there was no predicting what some fanatics might try and do.

In fact, Hirohito had only just settled down to a, no doubt, fitful sleep when Lieutenant Colonel Masataka Ida, the head of a group determined to stop the Emperor from surrendering, presented himself to Lieutenant General Takeshi Mori, the commander of the First Imperial Guards Division which was responsible for the safety and security of the palace. Ida urged Mori to switch allegiance and join the band of rebel officers. Mori, however, would have nothing to do with the plot but, soon afterwards, Major Kenji Hatanaka led a group of co-conspirators into Mori's headquarters and shot him dead.

Using the dead Mori's official seal, Major Hisdemasa Koga, a staff officer of the Guards Division, issued an order for the division's troops to occupy the Imperial Palace, seize all the gates and cut all telephone lines except the one linking the palace to the Guards' headquarters. The objective of the rebels was to cut all communication between the palace and the outside world, therefore stopping the broadcast of the surrender. No harm would be done to the Emperor, but the rebels'

RIGHT: **Japanese prisoners of war on Guam stand with their heads bowed after listening to Emperor Hirohito announce Japan's acceptance of Allied surrender terms, August 15, 1945.** (US Navy)

RIGHT: **Ships in Leyte Gulf, Philippines, firing pyrotechnic flares to celebrate the news that Japan had accepted the Allies' terms, August 15, 1945.** (USNHHC)



actions would demonstrate to Hirohito that his shameful act of surrender would not be accepted by the people. Japan would fight on.

Knowing that the discs were somewhere in the palace, the rebels started searching for the precious recordings. For over one-and-a-half hours the rebels searched for the discs, but to no avail. As the rebels' fruitless search was drawing to its conclusion, Major General Tatsuhiko Takashima, Chief of Staff of the Eastern District Army, began to doubt the authenticity of the orders for the palace to be taken over by the Guards Division and he contacted his commanding officer, General Shizuichi Tanaka. From that moment on, the conspiracy was doomed. Tanaka went straight to the barracks of the Guards Division and ordered the troops to stand down. The coup was at an end and, over the course of the following few hours, the leading conspirators committed hara-kiri.

"THE TOTAL EXTINCTION OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION"

At 12.00 hours, Japan standard time, on August 15, the Emperor's pre-recorded speech was finally broadcast on NHK. The word 'surrender' was never used.

Hirohito began his speech by stating that, "After pondering deeply the general trends of the world and the actual conditions obtaining in our empire today, we have decided to effect a settlement of the present situation by resorting to an extraordinary measure. We have ordered our government to communicate to the governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union that our empire accepts the provisions of their joint declaration."

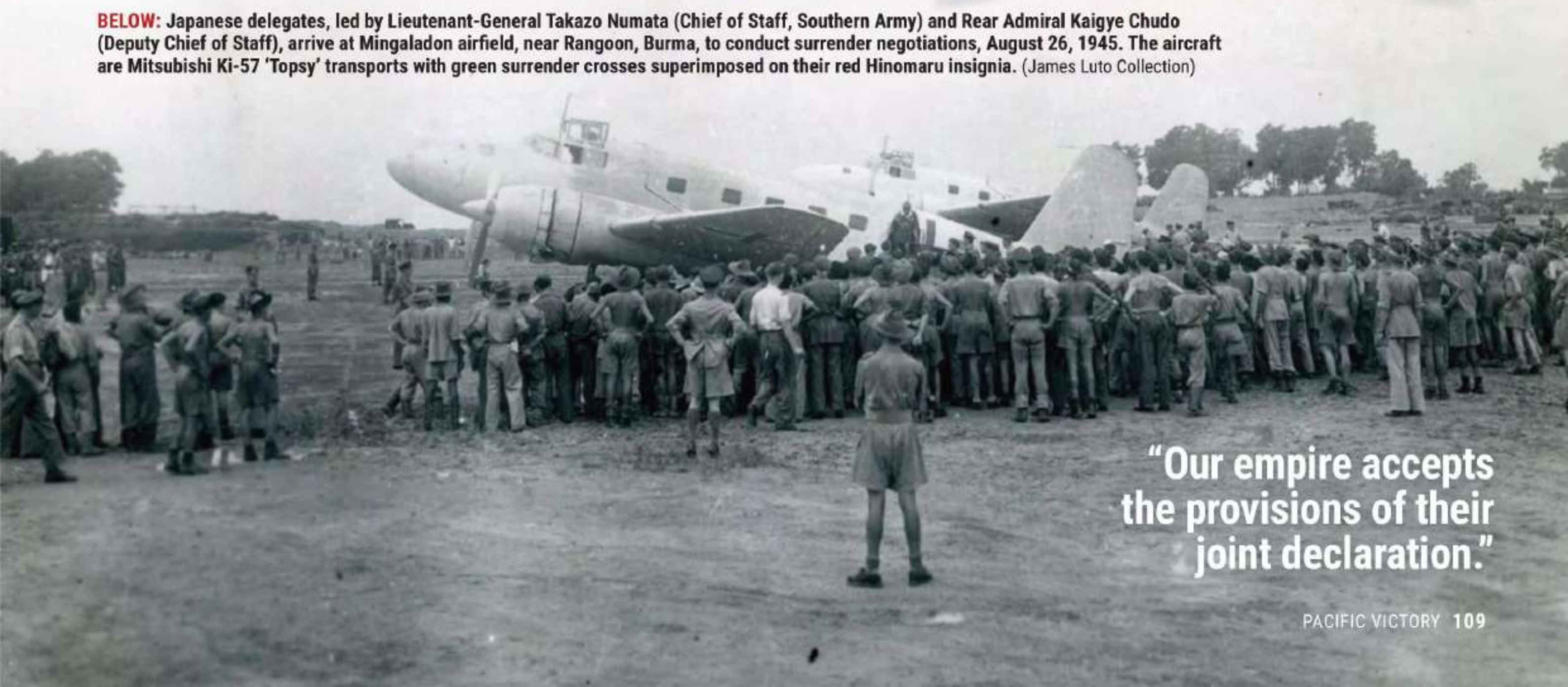
He went on to add that, "We declared war on America and Britain out of our sincere desire to ensure Japan's self-preservation and the stabilization of East Asia, it being far from our thought either to infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or to embark upon territorial aggrandizement. But now the war has lasted for nearly four years. Despite the best that has been done by everyone – the gallant fighting of the military and naval forces, the diligence and assiduity of our servants of the state, and the devoted service of our one hundred million people – the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage, while the general trends of the world have all turned against her interest."

That change in Japan's fortunes had, continued Hirohito, been clearly displayed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki only a few days earlier: "The enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is, indeed, incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should we continue to fight, not only would it result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would »

LEFT: One of the aircraft used by the Japanese delegation to travel to the Philippines to meet General MacArthur pictured at Ie Shima, Okinawa, on August 19, 1945. From there, the delegation was flown the rest of the way to Manila in a USAAF C-54 Skymaster. (USNHHC)

BELOW: Rear Admiral Ichiro Yokoyama, and members of surrender delegation from Japan, entering the Allied headquarters at Manila City Hall three hours after arriving from Ie Shima. (USNHHC)

BELOW: Japanese delegates, led by Lieutenant-General Takazo Numata (Chief of Staff, Southern Army) and Rear Admiral Kaigye Chudo (Deputy Chief of Staff), arrive at Mingaladon airfield, near Rangoon, Burma, to conduct surrender negotiations, August 26, 1945. The aircraft are Mitsubishi Ki-57 'Topsy' transports with green surrender crosses superimposed on their red Hinomaru insignia. (James Luto Collection)



"Our empire accepts the provisions of their joint declaration."

RIGHT: Japanese delegates arrive at the headquarters site at Mingaladon airfield to begin the surrender negotiations, August 26. (James Luto Collection)

lead to the total extinction of human civilization. Such being the case, how are we to save the millions of our subjects, or to atone ourselves before the hallowed spirits of our imperial ancestors? This is the reason why we have ordered the acceptance of the provisions of the joint declaration of the [Allied] powers."

CEASEFIRE IN THE FAR EAST

As the news of Hirohito's acceptance of the terms of the Potsdam Conference and the ceasefire adopted by his armed forces spread around the world, work began on formalising the Japanese surrender. It was at 16.00 hours on the afternoon of August 16, that Hirohito issued the order commanding "the entire armed forces of his nation to halt their fighting immediately".[1]

The wide dispersion and the disrupted communications of the Japanese military, noted MacArthur's own staff, "made the rapid and complete implementation of such an order exceedingly difficult. As the Japanese apologetically explained, the Imperial order would take approximately two to twelve days to reach Japanese forces throughout the Pacific and Asiatic areas, 'but whether and when the order will be received by the first line it is difficult to foresee.'"[2] To reinforce the Emperor's orders, members of the Japanese Imperial family were despatched to the various theatres of operations to act as his personal representatives and "expedite and ensure full compliance with the Imperial order to cease hostilities".

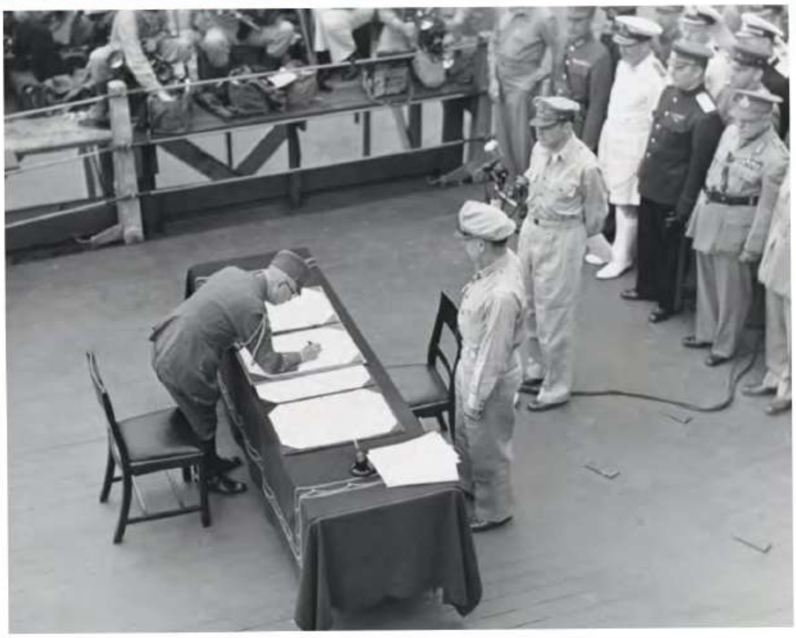
In order to implement the Allies' response to the ceasefire, President Truman announced that he had appointed General MacArthur as the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers. At the same time, he sent a series of instructions to the Japanese Government. As well as informing them of MacArthur's appointment, these orders directed the Japanese to, "send emissaries at once to the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers with information of the disposition of the Japanese forces and commanders, and [ensure that they are] fully empowered to make any arrangements directed by the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers to enable him and his accompanying forces to arrive at the place designated by him to receive the formal surrender".

For their journey to meet MacArthur, Hirohito's emissaries were to depart from Sata Misaki, on the southern tip of Kyushu, on the morning of August 17. They were instructed to travel in a transport aircraft that had been painted white and marked with green crosses on the wings and fuselage, and to fly under Allied escort to a US airbase at Ie Shima on Okinawa. There the delegation was transferred to a USAAF C-54 Skymaster to continue its journey.

MIDDLE RIGHT: Lieutenant Commander Edward Porter Clayton USN, who can be seen in the centre with his back to the camera, the Commanding Officer of Underwater Demolition Team 21, receives the first sword surrendered to an American force in the Japanese Home islands. The surrender was made by a Japanese Army Coast Artillery Major at Futtsu-misaki, across Tokyo Bay from Yokosuka Navy Base, on August 28, 1945. (USNHHC)

"Today the guns are silent. A great tragedy has ended."

BELOW: US and British warships anchored in Sagami Wan, outside of Tokyo Bay, Japan, on August 28, 1945. They had entered Japanese waters the previous day. (NARA)



LEFT: Pictured from atop USS *Missouri*'s 16-inch No.2 gun turret, General Yoshijiro Umezu signs the Instrument of Surrender on behalf of Japanese Imperial General Headquarters, September 2, 1945. (NARA)

During the subsequent meeting with MacArthur, the Allies' plans for the occupation of Japan were laid out.

SIGNING THE SURRENDER

The first Allied troops set foot on Japanese soil on August 28, when, for example, 150 American personnel flew to Atsugi, in Kanagawa Prefecture. Over the hours and days that followed, other Allied troops and marines arrived by air and sea. MacArthur himself reached Tokyo on August 30.

LEFT: A huge formation of carrier aircraft fly in formation over the US and British fleets anchored in Tokyo Bay, September 2, 1945. USS *Missouri* is in the left foreground. (NARA)

The official ending of the war occurred on the misty morning of Sunday, September 2, 1945, when Japanese representatives signed the official Instrument of Surrender, prepared by the United States War Department and approved by President Truman. As the battleship USS *Missouri* lay majestically at anchor in the calm waters of Tokyo Bay, convoys of large and small vessels formed a tight cordon around the surrender ship, while aircraft maintained a protective vigil overhead.

The decks of *Missouri* that momentous morning were crowded with the representatives of the various Allied nations that had participated in the Pacific War. Just before proceedings got underway and the surrender documents were brought onto the battleship, it became clear that the elegant mahogany table, a present from the British fleet, was too small to hold both documents during the signing. With only minutes to go, a humble folding table was grabbed from the crew's mess, where cooks had just finished cleaning up after breakfast. Hurriedly, a green tablecloth, stained with coffee spots, was draped on top.

Shortly before 09.00 hours Tokyo time, a launch headed out from the mainland and pulled alongside the battleship. At this point, the Japanese delegation stepped aboard the warship, including the two envoys empowered to sign on behalf of the Emperor – Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu and General Yoshijiro Umezu, the Chief of the Imperial Japanese Army General Staff – as well as three representatives apiece from the Foreign Office, Army, and Navy.

On reaching the deck, the Japanese delegates had to walk past eight seamen, each one more than six feet tall. They had been picked out in a calculated effort to emphasize Allied superiority and intimidate the Japanese representatives.

Presiding over the epoch-making ceremony, MacArthur inaugurated the proceedings with a speech which included the following statement: "We are gathered here, representatives of the major warring powers, to conclude a solemn agreement whereby peace may be restored. The issues, involving divergent ideals and ideologies, have

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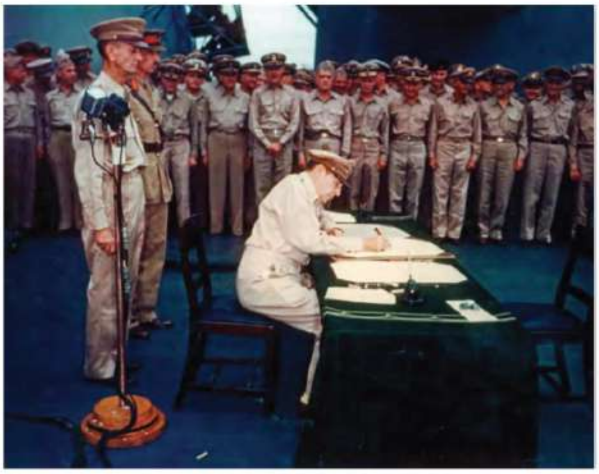


ABOVE: General Douglas MacArthur signs the Instrument of Surrender, as Supreme Allied Commander, on board USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, September 2, 1945. Behind him are Lieutenant General Jonathan M Wainwright and Lieutenant General Sir Arthur E Percival. (NARA)

LEFT: USS *Missouri* today rests proudly in Pearl Harbor. (John Grehan Collection)

ABOVE: The Supreme Allied Commander South East Asia Command, Lord Louis Mountbatten, ascends the steps at Municipal Hall, Singapore, for the Japanese surrender there on September 3, 1945. Behind him follows his senior commanders. (James Luto Collection)

ABOVE RIGHT: Japanese senior officers aboard the Royal Navy's heavy cruiser HMS *Cumberland* to discuss the Allied assumption of responsibility for the Dutch East Indies on September 15, 1945. (Historic Military Press)

BELOW: Japanese troops being moved under guard to a prisoner of war camp in Hong Kong, September 1945. (Historic Military Press)

been determined on the battlefields of the world and hence are not for our discussion or debate. Nor is it for us here to meet, representing as we do a majority of the people of the earth, in a spirit of distrust, malice or hatred. But rather it is for us, both victors and vanquished, to rise to that higher dignity which alone befits the sacred purposes we are about to serve, committing all our peoples unreservedly to faithful compliance with the understandings they are here formally to assume."

In what was described by USS *Missouri*'s navigator, James L Starnes, as a "very formal, very dignified ceremony", the two Japanese dignitaries were invited to step forward. This they did, duly signing their names on the Instrument of Surrender. The time was recorded as 09.04 hours.

At 09.10 hours, General MacArthur then put his signature to the document, the key paragraph of which read: "We hereby proclaim the unconditional surrender to the Allied Powers of the Japanese Imperial General Headquarters and of all Japanese armed forces and all armed forces under Japanese control wherever situated." Standing behind MacArthur as he signed were Lieutenant General Jonathan M Wainwright, US Army, and Lieutenant General Sir Arthur E Percival, British Army, both of whom had just been released from Japanese prisoner of war camps.

General MacArthur was then followed in turn by Admiral Nimitz, who signed on behalf of the United States, and by the representatives of the other United Nations present: General Hsu Yung-Chang for China, Admiral Sir Bruce Fraser for the United Kingdom, Lieutenant General Kuzma N Derevyanko for the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, General Sir Thomas A Blarney for Australia, Colonel L Moore-Cosgrave for Canada, General Jacques P. LeClerc for France, Admiral Conrad E L Helfrich for the Netherlands, and Air Vice-Marshal Leonard M Isitt for New Zealand. The entire signing ceremony lasted some twenty minutes, at which point the Japanese envoys, having been handed their copy of the surrender document, bowed stiffly and departed for Tokyo. Simultaneously, hundreds of Allied aircraft roared low over the USS *Missouri* in formation, a final, spectacular confirmation of the Allies' military might.

MacArthur, always the showman, could not resist one of his flamboyant speeches from the deck of *Missouri*: "Today the guns are silent. A great tragedy has ended. A great victory has been won. The skies no longer rain death – the seas bear only commerce men everywhere walk upright in the sunlight. The entire world is quietly at peace. The holy mission has been completed. And in reporting this to you, the people, I speak for the thousands of silent lips, forever stilled among the jungles and the beaches and in the deep waters of the Pacific which marked the way. I speak for the unnamed brave millions homeward bound to take up the challenge of that future which they did so much to salvage from the brink of disaster."[3]

ABOVE: The Japanese 33rd Army surrendered to the 17th Indian Division at Thaton, north of Moulmein, Burma, in the last week of October 1945. This was the Japanese Army that struck at India in the Kohima and Imphal areas early in 1944. Senior Japanese commanders presented their swords to the 17th Indian Division's Major General W A Crowther DSO. This image was taken during that handover ceremony. (James Luto Collection)

NOTES:

1. *Reports of General MacArthur*, Volume I (Washington D.C., 1966), p.446.
2. ibid.
3. Quoted from: ussmissouri.org/learn-the-history/surrender/general-macarthurs-radio-address.

VJ DAY

While the Japanese people were contemplating just what the Emperor's speech would mean for them, and the future of their country, around the world the celebrations marking the end of the war had already begun.

At 19.03 hours precisely on Wednesday, August 15, 1945, the scrolling news feed on the outside of the Times Tower in New York City suddenly reported the following: "Official – Truman announces Japanese surrender." Those few electrifying words set off a deafening roar from a crowd estimated to have been 2m strong.

"This is the day we have been waiting for since Pearl Harbor," President Truman went on to tell those who gathered outside the White House after hearing the news. "This is the day when fascism finally dies, as we always knew it would."

In Britain, the Royal Family greeted cheering crowds from the balcony of Buckingham Palace, whilst important or historic buildings all over London were floodlit. People crowded onto the streets of every town and city throughout the nation to celebrate.

LEFT: American servicemen and women gather in front of the Rainbow Corner Red Cross club in Paris to celebrate the unconditional surrender of the Japanese, August 15, 1945. (NARA)

The 15th also happened to be the day that the British Parliament reopened. Elated at the news from the Far East, huge crowds gathered to cheer King George VI and the Queen as they made their way to Westminster. That afternoon, Atlee rose in the House of Commons to make an announcement. "Mr Speaker," he began, "at midnight last night the terms of the Japanese surrender were announced to the world… Thus, the long, grievous war is at an end, and peace on earth has been restored. To each of us at this time there will come many memories and thoughts; to each of us at this time there will also come the wish to pay our tributes to those who have, in a lesser or greater degree, contributed to this final and complete victory."

The following evening King George VI addressed the nation and the Empire in a broadcast from his study at Buckingham Palace: "Our hearts are full to overflowing, as are your own. Yet there is not one of us who has experienced this terrible war who does not realise that we shall feel its inevitable consequences long after we have all forgotten our rejoicings today." »

BELOW: Pictured at 01.00 hours on August 15, 1945, this is part of the jubilant crowd that gathered in Piccadilly Circus to celebrate after hearing the Prime Minister's announcement of the Japanese ceasefire. (Historic Military Press)

RIGHT: **A floodlit St. Paul's Cathedral, illuminated to mark the Allies' victory over Japan, late on August 15, 1945.** (Historic Military Press)

Throughout the Allied nations, people took to the streets. "Five days of waiting, of rumor, intimation, fact, distortion – five agonizing days… came to an end for New York, as for the nation and the world, a moment or two after seven o'clock last night," reported the *New York Times*. Amid celebrations which went on for days, tickertape paper rained down on streets throughout the US, as conga lines snaked around large crowds, and people kissed anybody in sight.

The *Chicago Tribune* reported that a man climbed a ladder to light an 18-foot-tall solid wax victory candle that had taken three months to make. In downtown Chicago, a half-million people sang and danced down the main streets.

There was not quite such wild rejoicing in Australia for what was called VP Day – Victory in the Pacific – as the government, fearing that the celebrations might get out of hand, ordered pubs to close. Nevertheless, there was dancing in the streets and Melbourne's Chinese community celebrated what it called 'VC Day' for 'Victory in China' and, in true Chinese fashion, set off fireworks.

ABOVE: **A US sailor and a woman celebrating the announcement of Japan's surrender in Washington, D.C., on August 14, 1945.** (NARA)

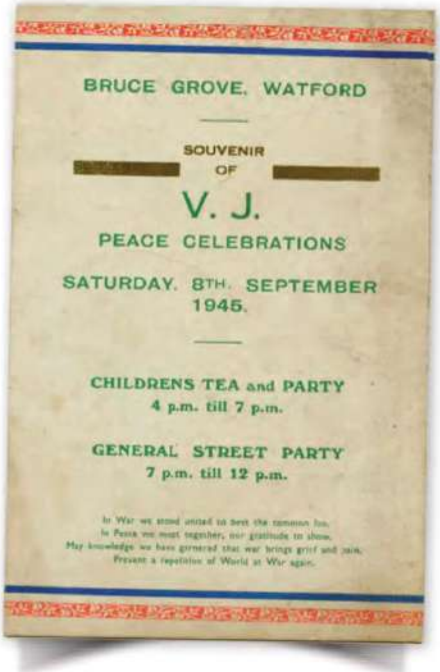
THE PRIME MINISTER'S BROADCAST

Prior to his speech in Parliament, Atlee had broken the momentous news of the Japanese ceasefire in a radio broadcast: "Let us recall that on December 7, 1941, Japan, whose onslaught China had resisted for over four years, fell upon the USA, who were then not at war, and upon ourselves, who were sore pressed in our death struggle with Germany and Italy. Taking full advantage of surprise and treachery, the Japanese forces quickly overran the territories of ourselves and our Allies in the Far East, and at one time it appeared as though they might reach the mainland of Australia and advance far into India. But the tide turned.

"First slowly and then with an ever-increasing speed and violence as the mighty forces of the United States and the British Commonwealth and Empire our Allies, and finally Russia, were brought to bear. Their resistance has now everywhere been broken…

"Our gratitude goes out to all our splendid allies above all to the United States, without whose prodigious efforts this war in the East would still have many years to run. We also think, especially at this time, of the prisoners in Japanese hands, of our friends in the Dominions, Australia and New Zealand, in India and Burma, and in those colonial territories upon whom the brunt of the Japanese attack fell. We rejoice that their sufferings will soon be at an end and that these territories will soon be purged of the Japanese invader."

Atlee's confirmation that both the 15th and 16th were to be public holidays, in the UK at least, meant everyone could celebrate the fact the fighting had come to end, not just in Europe but around the world.



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1945.

CHILDRENS TEA and PARTY
4 p.m. till 7 p.m.

GENERAL STREET PARTY
7 p.m. till 12 p.m.

In War we stood united to beat the common foe,
In Peace we meet together, our gratitude to show.
May knowledge we have garnered that war brings grief and pain,
Prevent a repetition of World at War again.

RIGHT: **A card programme for a victory celebrations party held in Bruce Grove, Watford, on September 8, 1945.** (James Luto Collection)

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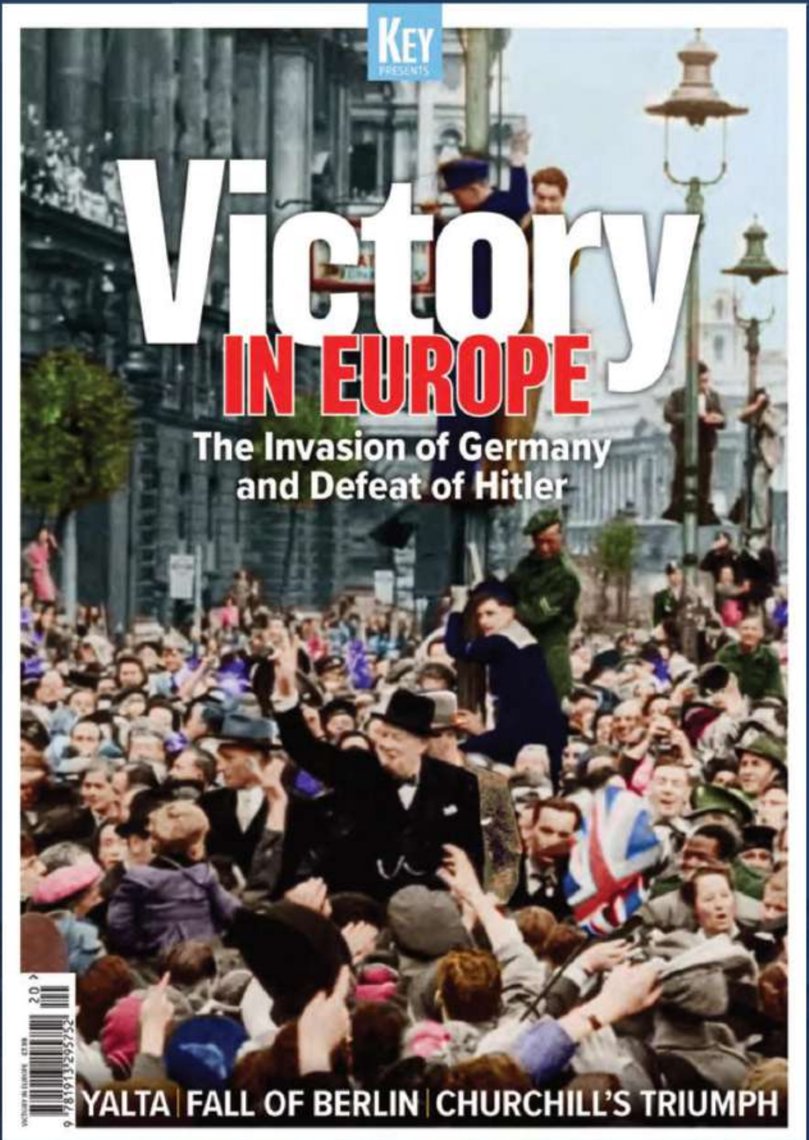
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